Invasion Of Afghanistan: Afghanistan’s Significance To New Zealand

The invasion of Afghanistan is an ongoing worldwide fight against terrorism. Ten soldiers have been lost so far, and the details of their missions and whereabouts are points of argument. The consequences of these deaths and the political issues surrounding New Zealand’s involvement in Afghanistan make it a significant event in New Zealand history.

Why was the United States targeted by Osama Bin Laden?

In 1979, Osama Bin Laden went to Afghanistan to fight with the USA against the USSR. He collected money and used it to fund Muslims from around the world to fight. After ten years of fighting, Bin Laden emerged victoriously and using his global connections from the war set up Al Qaeda. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and Bin Laden approached Prince Sultan bin Abdelaziz al-Saud, the Saudi defence minister, with the proposition that his forces should be the ones to stop the invasion of Kuwait, not the “American unbelievers” who are “a threat and potential enemy to Islam” (Jehl 2001). In 1988, Bin Laden issued a fatwa, referring to the Americans as “crusader armies” who were “occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places”. Religion, rather America’s lack of it, was Bin Laden’s main reason for targeting them. Saudi Arabia’s dismissal of Bin Laden and America control of the holy cities Mecca and Medina fueled Bin Laden’s hate for America. Also, in that 1988 Fatwa, “call[ed] on every Muslim who believes in God [...] to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money”. This shows that Bin Laden’s reasons for targeting America were not solemnly religious, but also economic. In 2004, Bin Laden issued another fatwa recounting the events of 9/11 and describing the aftermath and impacts of the event. Just as the Arab fighters and Afghan mujahideen had destroyed Russia economically, Al Qaeda was doing the same to America, “continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy”; “Al Qaeda spent $500,000 on the event[9/11]” whilst it cost America “more than a trillion dollars” (Laden 2004). Bin Laden’s reasons for targeting the USA were both religious and economic.

Why did the United States invade Afghanistan with New Zealand Support?

The invasion of Afghanistan was a direct consequence of the events of 9/11. Al Qaeda was based out of Afghanistan and thus America and its allies joined together to fight this war against terror. In a speech, on September 21 2001, President Bush set a decree to “pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism”, urging all nations to help in this pursuit and saying “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”. New Zealand’s opposition of terrorism and commitment to the United Nations actions to counter terrorism led to their joining of the war. On September 24 2001, Prime Minister Helen Clark wrote a letter to President Bush informing him that “New Zealand was ready to work with the United States and other members of the international community to eradicate terrorism and bring the perpetrators to justice”. The United States would have New Zealand’s “political, diplomatic, and intelligence support” and also a “military contribution” (Clark 2001). New Zealand has also ratified fourteen United Nations anti-terrorism conventions (Beath 2012).

Social Impacts on New Zealand Soldiers

The SAS involvement in Afghanistan has indirectly positively affected New Zealand by raising our public stature. New Zealand troops were stationed in Bamiyan and helped with the redevelopment and reconstruction of the area. The former Bamiyan governor, Dr Habibi Surabi commented on the positive nature of the New Zealand soldiers, “they were very social people. They engaged with the community and respected the community”. A soldier stationed in Bamiyan said, “The PRT gave 10 years of stability in Bamiyan. It gave 10 years for the Hazara people to be educated, get kick-started and have a fresh start at life” (Fisher 2017).

The psychological toll of going to war has plagued many soldiers with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). One such soldier witnessed a helicopter explode with sixteen people on board. His symptoms include impaired sleep, irritability, depression and limited motivation, pleasure, enjoyment and energy (Shadwell 2016).

For ten soldiers and their families, life will never be the same again. Ten soldiers have lost their lives so far in Afghanistan. What makes it worse is the NZDF’s vagueness surrounding the events in Afghanistan. No one, not even the families, know what truly happened to their loved ones, or where their bodies are. Venus Poa, the mother of Corporal Doug Hughes, explains that “she knows her son contributed to the ‘mission’ but doesn’t have great clarity on what that ‘mission’ was”. The NZDF ruled his death as “self-inflicted although his family have many unanswered questions” (Fisher 2017). Corporal Luke Tamatea’s Nan also shared on the vagueness of the NZDF, “We’d been hoping that John Key would have sent him back by now” (Watson 2012). We should not discredit the soldiers who lost their lives on the basis of the uncertainty of their mission. As the soldier stationed in Bamiyan says, “It is unfortunate we lost lives but if we don’t remember the good our soldiers have done it takes away why they lost their lives” (Fisher 2017). Afghanistan is especially significant to the soldiers who fought there affecting them both mentally and physically long term. All soldiers involved most likely have or are suffering from PTSD. All New Zealanders are affected by the loss of life, however, the families and friends of the fallen soldiers will never be the same again. The transparency surrounding the deaths of the soldiers impacts New Zealand’s global image.

Political Impacts on New Zealand

Afghanistan is significant to New Zealand history because of its political impacts. “Our military relationship with the US was now stronger than it has been for decades after the ‘no nukes’ split of the 1980s”, the soldier in Bamiyan comments. The CIA presence in Bamiyan operated out of the Kiwi base, which “housed a military intelligence post which was part of a national network of spy stations”. Afghanistan has played a big role in helping to rebuild New Zealand and America’s relationship and led to the signing of the Washington and Wellington Declarations. The Washington Declaration provides the framework to strengthen and expand our defense relationship with America. The Wellington Declaration provides a framework to help with cooperation around political, environmental and social problems.

New Zealand’s involvement in Afghanistan is unclear and there are many controversies regarding it, such as civilian casualties, the treatment of prisoners of war and defamation. In 2017, Nicky Hager and Jon Stephenson released Hit and Run, a book detailing the involvement of New Zealand troops in two Afghan villages, Naik and Khak Khuday Dad. These claims were

denied by Chief of Defence Force, Lieutenant General Tim Keating who said, “NZDF troops never operated in the two villages identified in the book as having been the scene of combat operations and civilians casualties” (The Spinoff 2017). NATO’s ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), investigation into the matter determined that “a gun sight malfunction on a coalition helicopter resulted in several rounds falling short, missing the intended target and instead of striking two buildings” (The Spinoff 2017). The investigation concluded that it was possible civilian casualties could have occurred, but no evidence of this was found. Hager and Stephenson “are absolutely confident that a SAS raid took place on 22 August 2010 where six civilians were killed and another fifteen injured” (The Spinoff 2017). They have testimony from members of the SAS, Afghan commandos and villagers from Naik and Khak Khuday Dad who all recalled the assaults on these villages. “It is actually impossible that the story is wrong” Hager and Stephenson comment.

The NZDF retaliated to the release of Hit and Run by attempting to defame the authors. Keating claimed that the book was published to create animosity, “Mr Hager has written a book with the idea of selling it. It's an election year. It shouldn't surprise anyone that he has brought out a book that is designed to cause a degree of trouble” (Stuff 2017). Stephenson published an article in 2011, Eyes Wide Shut, where he visited a base in the Afghan capital Kabul and was told by an Afghan commander that SAS troops were taking and detaining prisoners. The then-commander Lieutenant General Rhys Jones said that Stephenson never visited the base and Prime Minister John Key “told reporters Jon Stephenson’s claims in Metro did not stack up” (Mediawatch 2015). In 2013, Stephenson sued Jones for defamation and they eventually settled in 2015; the NZDF agreed that Stephenson did get entry to the base and interviewed the Afghan commander, commenting “They [NZDF] regret that their statement may have been interpreted as suggesting that this had not happened” (Mediawatch 2015).

New Zealand has possibly committed war crimes in Afghanistan; the killing of civilians, and inhumane treatment of detainees. In Hit and Run civilian casualties are addressed and in Eyes Wide Shut the inhumane treatment of detainees is addressed. Abdul Wahid, a SAS detainee, says the Americans possessing him forced him to sit with legs and hands bound to a piece of wood. It was so painful he passed out. “Later they took us to another room and they tore off all our clothes. Then they took us to an area where some Americans were sitting and they made us walk in front of them naked [...] I was praying to my God to let me die.” he says (Stephenson 2011). New Zealand also transferred detainees to the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS). The NDS have a fearsome reputation for torture, “including amputation of limbs, electric shocks, deprivation of sleep, water and food, beatings by rod and cable, scorching and death” (Stephenson 2011). New Zealand, America and Afghanistan are all signatories of the Geneva Conventions which prohibits the torture and degrading of prisoners. It also says any country transferring prisoners must be satisfied that the receiving country will abide to the conventions. Bush declared that the Geneva Conventions need not apply to Taliban or Al Qaeda because they were unlawful combatants. The NZDF legal services director, Kevin Riordan, responded by telling the NZDF Bush was not to decide who is and isn’t a prisoner of war; such decisions are to be made by a competent tribunal. In 2007, Bruce Ferguson, former Defence Force chief, negotiated a deal with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to follow up on any prisoners New Zealand forces helped to capture. Journalist David Beatson discovered that the ICRC had no record of such a deal. In fact, the ICRC are prohibited by their own rules from giving any kind of this information to the New Zealand Government. The transparency of New Zealand’s involvement questions their culpability of war crimes. Since we don’t know everything, are the NZDF hiding something? This affects all New Zealanders because it

diminishes our public image and challenges our Government's clarence and truthfulness. Will countries trust or collaborate us if these claims are proven true?

The effects of Afghanistan are ongoing as the war is yet to end. It has lasted ten years longer than Vietnam meaning more soldiers are affected than ever before. The political controversies, the possibility of war crimes, affect all New Zealanders on a global scale, tarnishing our public image. However, it is more significant to a small group; the soldiers and their families. War takes an awful psychological and physical toll upon all involved. Their lives and their families lives will never be the same again. For the ten fallen soldiers, the ultimate loss was made. Although New Zealand deaths have been declining in wars (approximately 18000 in WW1, 11928 in WW2, 37 in Vietnam, and 10 in Afghanistan), they are not less real. A loss of a relative in Afghanistan would still feel the same as a loss of a relative in WW1, perhaps worse - all of New Zealand was dealing with this in WW1, whereas only a small group of New Zealanders are concerned about Afghanistan. The publicity of Afghanistan is minimal compared to WW1 and WW2 so the soldiers involved have less support from communities and the Government.

Bibliography:

1. Jehl, D. (2001). 'A NATION CHALLENGED: SAUDI ARABIA; Holy War Lured Saudis As Rulers Looked Away'. The New York Times, 27 December, p. A00001. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/27/world/a-nation-challenged-saudi-arabia-holy-war-lured-saudis-as-rulers-looked-away.html. (accessed April 2019)
2. Laden, O. B. (1998). 'Text of Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans'. Al-Quds al-'Arabi, 23 February. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/10TFkdmDoHmVCdj1fGkveZsMK3KocXSH8FlTde99HyuU/edit. (accessed April 2019)
3. Laden, O. B. (2004). 'Full transcript of bin Ladin's speech'. Al Jazeera, 2 November. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html. (accessed April 2019)
4. Bush, G (2001). 'Text of George Bush's speech'. The Guardian, 21 September. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13. (accessed April 2019)
5. Beehive (2001). 'NZ shares US determination to root out terrorism'. Beehive, 21 September. Retrieved from https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-shares-us-determination-root-out-terrorism. (accessed April 2019)
6. Beath, L (2012). 'Terrorism and counter-terrorism - New Zealand in the "War on Terror", Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 20 June. Retrieved from https://teara.govt.nz/en/terrorism-and-counter-terrorism/page-4. (accessed April 2019)
7. Fisher, D (2017). '10 years, eight lives and $300m in Bamiyan - was New Zealand's time in Afghanistan worth it?'. The New Zealand Herald, 28 March. Retrieved from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11825859. (accessed April 2019)
8. Shadwell, T (2016). 'Veteran soldier and former policeman wins PTSD battle against New Zealand Defence Force'. Stuff, 3 November. Retrieved from https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/86027459/veteran-soldier-and-former-policeman-wins-ptsd-battle-against-new-zealand-defence-force (accessed April 2019)
9. Watson, M (2012). 'Man Mountain' Luke Tamatea did Kawerau proud'. Stuff, 20 August. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/7511513/Man-mountain-Luke-Tamatea-did-Kawerau-proud (accessed April 2019)

10. The Spinoff (2017). ‘The Hit & Run stakes just got even higher. Here are the rival views, from NZ Defence and Hager/Stephenson’. The Spinoff, 26 March. Retrieved from https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/26-03-2017/the-hit-run-stakes-just-got-even-higher-here-are-the-rival-views-from-nz-defence-and-hagerstephenson/ (accessed April 2019)
11. Stuff (2017). ‘NZDF chief warns there better be ‘hard evidence’ for any war crimes allegations’. Stuff, 22 March. Retrieved from https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/90718507/nzdf-chief-warns-there-better-be-hard-evidence-for-any-war-crime-allegations (accessed April 2019)
12. Mediawatch (2015). ‘A settlement that raised unsettling issues’. RNZ, 11 October. Retrieved from https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/201773633/a-settlement-that-raised-unsettling-issues (accessed April 2019)
13. Stephenson, J (2017). ‘Eyes Wide Shut: The Government’s Guilty Secrets in Afghanistan’. Noted, 22 March. Retrieved from https://www.noted.co.nz/currently/politics/eyes-wide-shut-the-governments-guilty-secrets-in-afghanistan/ (accessed April 2019)