

ISSUE OF THE WEEK | Australia at war

The death of another soldier in Afghanistan has again raised the question of whether our troops should be there at all. **Chris McHugh**, CEO of the RSL in Queensland says soldiers know the risk and can't abandon people in need but **Ann Picot**, member of the Stop the War Coalition says only Afghans can provide the political solution needed.

Caught in the line of fire

McHugh:

Although this may not have a direct effect on our everyday lives, we cannot turn our backs on the people of Afghanistan

By **CHRIS MCHUGH**

AS an ex- serviceman, I have seen first hand the horror of war and would like to think that war was never an option.

However, as we all know, unfortunately the argument isn't that simple. If only we could look at these situations and find a clear-cut solution.

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Returned and Services League of Australia (Queensland Branch) I have met and assisted many former and serving members of the Australian Defence Force who are suffering in one way or another as a result of their time in the services.

Meeting these people and hearing their stories, there are definitely times when it is understandable to question the purpose of war.

Provided that decisions are made above party politics and that at the forefront of these decisions the best interests of the service people involved are always considered, the Returned and Services League of



Australia (Queensland Branch) will follow the lead of the Australian Government's decisions regarding the Afghanistan War.

Yes, there will always be sacrifices made and sadly since 2002, 29 Australian service people have made the ultimate sacrifice in this war, losing their lives.

Even without an in depth understanding of the issues in Afghanistan, the Australian public can gain an insight into their struggles by considering the millions of refugees fleeing the country.

Although this may not have a direct effect on our everyday lives, we cannot turn our backs on the people of Afghanistan, but we can make sure that the Australians returning from this conflict are adequately cared for.

The Returned & Services League (Queensland Branch) will be here to provide support to the former and serving members of the Australian Defence Force and their dependants for as long as required.

Chris McHugh is the Chief Executive Officer of the RSL (Queensland Branch)

Picot: This year we will spend \$1.3 billion on the Afghanistan operations – money we need for necessities

By **ANNE PICOT**

TEN years of war in Afghanistan has seen 29 Australian soldiers die, thousands of NATO troops, tens of thousands of Afghans, and millions displaced as refugees. And for what?

Prime Minister Julia Gillard's echo of John Howard, "We will stay the course to fight terrorism" is not convincing now the war is going so badly.

This July, the insurgents killed President Karzai's brother, the mayor of Kandahar, the President's ally in Uruzgan (where the Australians are stationed), and launched spectacular assaults in Kabul itself.

The UN was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. Violence against women continues and ethnic minorities, like the Hazaras, are murdered with impunity.

Corruption flourishes, from foreign aid money and the opium trade, as accountable government is impossible without security. It is estimated at least 60% of the population suffers from post traumatic stress.

The war costs the US \$6.7 billion a month



when it is suffering the worst recession since the 1930s.

This year our government will spend \$1.3 billion on the Afghanistan operations, money we need for necessities like renewable energy, public transport, more nurses and teachers or a natural disaster public insurance scheme.

Our troops are not stopping the reactionary Taliban, or the war lord armies in Afghanistan. The little aid they provide helps a tiny number of Afghans in one province.

There is no credible terrorist threat to Australia from Afghanistan. The only reason Australian troops are there is to support the US-Australia alliance. That is no reason for them to die there.

Eventually the Americans will withdraw because they cannot win this war. A political solution is needed, which only the Afghans can provide.

Peace activist, Malalai Joya, a former member of the Afghan parliament says: "The Afghans will deal with the Taliban and the war lords but cannot deal with either while our country is under an occupation which recruits men to the insurgency because they see no other future".

Our troops should come home. Afghans can determine their own future and Australia should provide funds and support to local organisations for health and education services to their people.

Anne Picot is a member of the Stop the War Coalition, Sydney.

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

"Yes, there will always be sacrifices made and sadly since 2002, 29 Australian service people have made the ultimate sacrifice in this war, losing their lives." - Chris McHugh

"The only reason Australian troops are there is to support the US-Australia alliance. That is no reason for them to die there." - Anne Picot



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