

Script For Film: 'Operation Slipper' by Catarina Piperidis

Since late 2001, Australian troops have been serving in Afghanistan as a part of Operation Slipper. The objective of this ongoing operation is to contribute to the United States-led operation against international terrorism and to the Multinational Maritime Interception force in the Persian Gulf (Gillespie, 2006, online). The ADF is focusing specifically on the Oruzgan Province, aiming to defeat the Taliban and Al Quada by way of "helping Afghanistan's democratically elected government create a secure and stable environment in that country", and rebuilding or renovating highschools, hospitals, (Topsfield, *The Age*, 2007) roads and patrol bases as the reconstruction taskforce (Australian Government Department of Defence, [Internet Video] Aug, 2008), and a part of ISAF. The total Australian commitment is now 1090 troops (Australian Government Department of Defence, 2008, online).

I believe that the ADF's decision to be a part of Operation Slipper in Afghanistan is that of a responsible citizen, however the precise objective and progress of Operation Slipper is not made clear to the public, causing confusion and hesitancy to support the cause. Firstly I will look at the general roles of the ADF in Afghanistan. I will then explore what it is to be a responsible citizen and how being one is relevant to the ADF, in addition to identifying our key Australian values. Lastly, I will investigate the ADF's role in Afghanistan to decide if their actions are that of a responsible citizen, and consider how informed Australians are about these actions and the reason for them.

The Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary defines responsible as being morally obliged to carry out a duty, and The Macquarie Junior dictionary describes a citizen as being a member of a nation. Together they amount to- a member of a nation (in this case, Australia) who is morally obliged to carry out a duty. Our duties vary but all are in the interest of making the world a better place to live in. Responsible citizenship requires moral accountability (Hay & Foley, 1998, online). Being a responsible citizen is relevant to the ADF whether they serve in Australia, or overseas. To have moral accountability is vital to making decisions on who and how to help, and is what contributes one step further to global peace. Our core Australian values include tolerance, respect for diverse cultures, and giving everyone a "fair go".

The ADF's role in Afghanistan very much involves giving Afghans a "fair go", by rebuilding what the Taliban has devastated, preventing it from being a safe haven for terrorists (Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2008, online), helping Afghan troops in Guerrilla wars and the Kabul government from the Taliban resurgence. However, the good work being done in Afghanistan is criticised by Professor Hugh White- head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. Professor White challenges (in *ANU Reporter*, 2007, online) "How exactly, is any of the work now being done in and around Tarin Kowt meant to defeat the Taliban, strengthen the Kabul Government or sway political, religious and social alignments in this part of Afghanistan...only an intervention many times the scale and intensity of the current effort would have a serious chance of success...before we risk the lives of young Australians by sending them there...we need to ask whether this will make any real difference." Professor White makes a point-6 Australian troops have died in Afghanistan during Operation Slipper (Tanter, 2008, online), and the scale of the current effort may be small. However, Professor White cannot fairly judge the impacts that our troops are having in Afghanistan, or know the lives that have been saved or improved by their presence. Although it may not make any major difference by being there, if it stops Afghanistan's society from slipping any closer to that of Iraq and protects their new democratic government then it fits under moral accountability. The ADF as a responsible citizen has a duty to protect and help these people to the best of their ability, while at the same time protecting our troops from harm.

These sorts of opinions strongly against the operation in Afghanistan may stem from the fact that the public has only a vague idea of the ADF's purpose in Afghanistan but a very clear idea of the deaths there. In a recent poll conducted by the Lowy Institute across Australia, support for Australia's commitment to Afghanistan has dwindled with a majority of people surveyed opposed to involvement (ABC News, 2008, online). Following is an interview with the Institute's executive director, Alan Gyngell (Sound excerpt>> "I think that people don't quite understand why we're in Afghanistan... It seems in some ways that the sort of attitudes to Iraq have transferred themselves sort of seamlessly across to Afghanistan and I suppose that's not particularly surprising in view of the combat deaths we've had there... The Government has made clear that it wants to continue the Australian commitment to Afghanistan - that it thinks it is very important. But there is an obvious need, I think, to explain to Australians more why we're there" from site:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/29/2377129.htm?section=features>)

(ABC News, 2008, online). Of the people surveyed, only half believed the government was working to a clear aim (ABC News, 2008, online). -further highlighting the confusion and possibly the reason the public is opposed to our commitment to Afghanistan and would assume its current circumstances are like that of Iraq, which our nation knows a lot about. It would benefit our government to make it apparent to the public the roles and achievements of the ADF in Afghanistan, in order to gain the support of Australians. It would also help them to realise it is not at the stage Iraq is at, and what is being done there to prevent that from happening. This is also a part of being a responsible citizen, as being a member of a nation and furthermore involving people in the decisions of our nation, that affect them either on a personal level, or otherwise.

If the purpose and goals of Operation Slipper was shown more publicly to the nation, I believe it would be more accepted and supported and recognised for being morally accountable; therefore the proper actions of a responsible citizen. Professor Hugh White demonstrates views similar to many people of the nation, asserting that the roles of troops in Afghanistan are not generating a change. However, Mr Alan Gyngell expressed that he believes many people of our nation are not informed of the operations in Afghanistan and the negative attitudes towards it may be due to the well known situation in Iraq, believing that we are risking young Australians' lives for no purpose or outcome. By notifying the public of the reason for our troops in Afghanistan, the support for their operations may increase. The ADF's actions in Afghanistan is improving and benefiting the country. The work that our troops carry out is that of a responsible citizen-supporting and helping a struggling country to get back on their feet. Preventing these terrorists from having a safe refuge protects not only the citizens of Afghanistan, but all the people in the world. As a responsible citizen, the ADF in Afghanistan is helping to create a peaceful and sustainable place (Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2008, online) for people to live, and a safer world for everyone to live in.

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