

Sarah Watson

Submission to support the IPAN Inquiry

As a former member of the Australian Army, who now suffers significant injuries from Operational Service in Iraq, I want to see changes made to the decision-making processes for committing young Australian men and women to wars and conflicts that are not only **not** our battles to fight but **not** in Australia's best interests.

Within a fortnight of being in Iraq on what would be a seven-month tour of duty from November 2006 to June 2007 in a southern province of Iraq to provide, I was asking myself the question "What are we doing here?". The mission was vague; we were to provide "overwatch" and a small mentoring role for the Iraqi Army. No weapons of mass destruction had been yet found in Iraq, however, Saddam Hussein was hanged 6 weeks after the arrival of our Battlegroup, causing a spike in insurgent activity (increasing rocket attacks against the base we were on). It became clear we were there for political reasons (alliance with the US) as opposed to any real interest in Australia's national security. It was also clear that the local population did not want troops there. We did more harm than good for the people of Iraq and now their country is still suffering the consequences.

I suffer from PTSD and moral injury from my service in Iraq. My marriage has broken down as a result. My children now also suffer due to the trauma sustained in my military service.

From the group that I deployed with to Iraq, I know of one Army Officer who took his life, leaving behind a young daughter, and multiple others who now suffer PTSD as a result of the Iraq deployment.

There must be greater transparency and debate in the future commitment of Australian men and women to wars and conflicts that Australia has no real reason to be involved in. If we don't, the price will be a continued increase of veteran suicide, broken families and lives ruined and more often than not, a worsening security environment in those countries we deploy to.

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