

My responses to the QoN are as follows:

Extract from proof Hansard transcript (at pp. 2-3):

Senator LAMBIE: Do you know how many times, during that 20 years in the Middle East, we were able to put a point across that didn't align with the US and have them accept how we were aligned and where we wanted the objectives to go?

Prof. Stockings: I'm sorry; I couldn't give that information off the top of my head. But I can tell you that Australians, particularly embeds, have never been shy in advancing what they believe to be Australia's objectives and interests. We have a national commander in Afghanistan, like elsewhere, who absolutely gets involved in those sorts of discussions. This isn't just on land either; it's at sea as well. The same issues develop for the Navy.

I am unable to be able to put a number on it. This type of frank discussion of our views occurred in multiple forums, and on different issues: meetings of political leaders/ministers, of military leaders, and within Afghanistan itself. At the strategic level there were certainly times when Australia refused requests for additional commitments to ISAF (coming from Nato, but there was a strong US hand on Nato's activities, of course). The refusal in 2010 to lead the CTU (and take leadership in Uruzgan province) is certainly another case in point. Other examples include Australia's intention to keep its forces, as well as those Afghan units it was mentoring, inside Uruzgan province. At an operational level, there were examples of MTF commanders not agreeing to direction from the US CTU commander to undertake certain activities, owing to a different definition of command authority and the Australian mission, and our decision in late 2012 regarding the timing of the withdrawal of mentoring teams in the districts ran counter to RC-South direction, causing some friction with the US commander. These were not decisions that American or ISAF commanders necessarily agreed with. On the question of the broader objectives of the war, Australia, under the Rudd government particularly, sought - and achieved - a presence and a stronger voice in strategic planning fora, especially with NATO - precisely because decisions were being made without our input. In the end, it is fair to say Australia had a major hand in reform of Nato processes for involvement of non-member states in military operations, which allowed comment (and some involvement in drafting) policy and involvement in policy debate, but we ultimately did not have a vote. We had better visibility and a forum to raise our voice, but Australia's influence was still primarily around the edges of policy. Australia was notoriously frank in its criticism of NATO's approach, and the lack of cohesion in ISAF, but the reality is that Australia was only a relatively small player. Remember, until late in our Afghanistan commitment, Australia was not even the lead nation in its own province. Big decisions, therefore, were the purview of those doing the heavier lifting. Had Australia wished to have more influence, particularly in the early days of its commitment, it would have had to assume a more significant and leadership role.

Extract from proof Hansard transcript (at p. 3):

Senator ABETZ: Following on from that, how many countries were involved in the Afghan operation over the 20 years?

Prof. Stockings: Many, Senator. I don't have the list in front of me, but certainly we're talking in the 20s or 30s, perhaps 50. The big difference is between those who committed in spirit and in very minor ways and those—a much smaller number—who committed to Afghanistan in terms of troops on the ground.

I believe the largest number of nations participating in Afghanistan at any given time is 49, during the 'surge' period in 2011.