

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.33)

Senator the Honourable Penny Wong asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 15 October 2021:

On 15 July the Morrison-Joyce Government declared via The Australian newspaper that it would not join a United States evacuation mission to rescue Afghan civilians who helped Australia, and that it had “no plan” to mount a similar operation. Who made the decision to not participate in the US evacuation operation?

- a. When was the decision made not to participate?
- b. Was this decision made by Cabinet? If so, when?
- c. Did DFAT provide advice to the Minister about the US airlift and the potential benefits for people’s safety if they were to be evacuated at that time?
- d. Did Defence provide advice to the Minister about the US airlift and the potential benefits for people’s safety if they were to be evacuated at that time?
- e. Did any Department recommend that Australia should participate?
- f. If no, why not? What was the rationale for not participating in or developing plans for an evacuation operation as the Taliban was making territorial gains in regional Afghan cities and provinces?
- g. Was it Defence’s assessment that an evacuation was not required?
- h. Was it DFAT’s assessment that an evacuation was not required?
- i. Was it Home Affairs’ assessment that an evacuation was not required?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Honourable Senator’s question:

Decisions relating to evacuations were made by the Government.

In July 2021, the Afghan government remained in power and Kabul airport remained open. Australians and Australian visa holders were able to leave Kabul by commercial means. There was no requirement for a military evacuation.

Other parts of the question should be referred to DFAT and Home Affairs.