

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing 21-24 May 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1.2 National Security and International Policy

Topic: Taliban in an Afghan coalition government - comments made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Senator: Senator Ryan

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Question:

Senator RYAN: I would like to ask you, as the minister representing the Prime Minister: what is the policy of the Prime Minister and the Australian government on involvement of the Taliban in an Afghan coalition government?

Senator Chris Evans: As you would be well aware, I am not briefed to provide you with a detailed response on foreign affairs questions. I am happy to take it on notice to see whether the Prime Minister has anything to add to what the foreign ministry and the foreign minister have to say. You have the great advantage in the current arrangements to have the foreign minister himself appearing at Senate estimates. I am sure you can discuss these matters with him at great length.

Answer:

The Prime Minister has addressed the matter of reconciliation and the possible inclusion of the Taliban in an Afghan coalition government a number of times, including in her speech to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute on 17 April 2012 and her remarks to the press while at the NATO/ISAF Summit in Chicago on 20-21 May 2012. She also discussed reconciliation and a possible political settlement in her addresses to the Parliament on 21 November 2011 and 18 November 2010.

Most recently, on 20 May, the Prime Minister said:

“We’ve said for some time now that if there are elements of the Taliban who are prepared to renounce violence, cut any links with international terrorism and accept the Afghan constitution, then they should be involved in reconciliation discussions. This needs to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.”

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“We are ultimately talking about the political composition of the leadership of the Afghan nation. So, yes, this is a difficult issue but we do believe that endeavours need to continue to be made to seek political reconciliation.”