



Media Release

Senator Mathias Cormann

Liberal Senator for Western Australia

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Iraqi troop withdrawal driven by operational requirements not pre-election policy

Australia's troop withdrawal from Southern Iraq has nothing to do with any Labor Party pre-election commitment on Iraq but is entirely driven by changed operational requirements and significant improvements in the situation on the ground in Iraq Senator Mathias Cormann said.

Pointing to evidence to the Senate Estimates Committee by defence chief Angus Houston, Senator Cormann said that the Overwatch Battle Group of about 515 personnel is leaving Southern Iraq because their job is done.

"That is certainly the judgement of defence chief Angus Houston when giving evidence at Senate Estimates yesterday", Senator Cormann said.

"Air Chief Marshal Houston went even further when he made the point that even if there had been a different government in Australia at the moment, we would be having the same sort of conversation about troop withdrawals from Southern Iraq.

Air Chief Marshal Houston told the Committee that on the ground in Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar the Iraqis were now taking care of business.

"By the time of the withdrawal we will have had provincial Iraqi control in both Al Muthanna and in Dhi Qar for about 18 months to two years," Senator Cormann said.

"This is a great credit to the work done by our defence forces in training Iraqi personnel over the past number of years in those two provinces.

"The reality is that we will continue to have a significant Australian defence presence in Iraq.

"We will continue to have the security detachment, we will continue to have Australian defence personnel embedded in the coalition headquarters, we will continue to fulfil a range of training and logistical functions, and we will continue to have HMAS Arunta deployed to the northern Persian Gulf for some time yet.

"Clearly this is not a major withdrawal from our commitment in Iraq, but more appropriately an adjustment to our commitment in light of changed circumstances on the ground and changed operational requirements.

"No doubt, moving forward Australia will continue to make similar adjustments as local requirements evolve.