
HOPES FOR IS-FREE IRAQ BY ELECTION IN 2018

-

12.09.2017

ABC News, 12 September 2017

There are hopes Islamic State militants in Iraq could be crushed by the time the beleaguered nation heads to the polls next year.

Air Commodore Terry van Haren, who heads up Australia's air combat operations over Iraq and Syria, believes the Iraqi Security Forces and US-led coalition have now reached a 'tipping point'.

'There's operational momentum,' the Air Task Group commander told AAP in the Middle East.

Commander of the task unit group Captain Steve Young says there are signs IS (also called Daesh) is losing will.

'If you're an optimist you could say we're breaking the back of Daesh,' he told AAP.

The Iraqis are setting the drum beat on the pace and intensity of the war effort.

Mosul, the Iraqi capital of the so-called IS caliphate, fell in July after a nine-month campaign.

In August the offensive against Tal Afar defied all expectations and was done and dusted in 10 days.

With the Iraqi government due to face voters in April or May 2018, clearing the country of all IS territory would no doubt bolster Prime Minister Haider al- Abadi's chances.

Much of the prime minister's popularity rests on recent military successes along with some level of

economic rebound.

But there's are risk factors to ongoing progress.

Iraqi Security Forces could potentially over stretch themselves as they push into new areas and stabilise reclaimed territory. And the eastern Syrian region is regarded as Wild West territory, never having had strong government control.

Commander van Haren says three months into the campaign to recapture the IS stronghold of Raqqa, the offensive is 'going well but slowly'.

US Brigadier General Derek France, who commands the 380th Air Wing, is predicting a tough fight against IS in the Euphrates River Valley region between both Syria and Iraq.

He's more pessimistic on time frames.

'To say all the ISIS fighters will be out of Iraq by May that seems a stretch to me,' he told AAP.

Australia has six Super Hornets conducting sorties across Iraq and Syria, along with an air-to-air refuelling tanker and Wedgetail early warning and control aircraft.

The Australian air strike contribution represents about five per cent of the overall coalition effort.

Australia's total personnel contribution to the fight against IS is 780 - 300 in air operations, 300 training and mentoring Iraqi soldiers and police and the rest doing special operations.

Kaynak/Source: