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## Govt Denies Last Chance for Iraq War Vote

For the third time this week the Government has denied the Parliament the vote on Australian troops being involved in a unilateral US invasion of Iraq, in the process denying the Australian people their say on the issue, according to Peter Andren Member for Calare

To applause from the public gallery today, Mr Andren voiced the concerns of the Australian people that their defence forces not be committed to war without the full support of the UN Security Council's permanent members and that their Parliament vote on it.

"This was most likely the last chance for a parliamentary vote on Iraq if the war is on after March 14<sup>th</sup> as George W Bush has flagged, so I interrupted Question Time to bring it on," Mr Andren said.

"Although the Government let me finish my speech this time, after gagging me and Tony Windsor twice this week in our attempts to get the vote, they still denied the Parliament and therefore the Australian people, the right to have their say on this life and death issue.

"The Prime Minister responded to the motion himself, refuting that a decision on war would be made next week despite his own suggestions in the media that this is the case.

"Mr Howard then said no decision had yet been made and a vote of the House would be premature at this stage, but I don't recall this being a problem for the votes on Iraq that were taken in the US Congress and the UK Parliament last week.

"Thirty percent of Australians do not want war under any circumstances. Eighty per cent of people in Calare are saying no without a specific UN mandate.

"I have been fighting to get a vote from the Parliament that we do not become involved in a war that does not have the unanimous support of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, a stance supported by most Australians.

"While Mr Howard said that once Cabinet has made its decision Parliament will have a debate, Tony Abbott said soon after that '*this Parliament will have a vote before Australian armed forces go into action in Iraq*'. I will now be holding the Government to Mr Abbott's undertaking.

"The Opposition attempted to clarify their position with Mr Crean stating that the ALP would oppose Australian involvement in a unilateral military action against Iraq but succeeded only in confusing it all the more.

"Mr Crean did not withdraw his escape clause to support an invasion in the event of a permanent Security Council member's veto. He then said that the ALP had also been trying all along to get a vote on Iraq, when two weeks ago they voted with the Government to stop me doing just that.

"On this increasingly messy and dangerous situation, I stand by my closing words today: 'We could have been, and should have been, an agent for world peace and not a provocateur. Like New Zealand and several other countries, including Scandinavian ones, we had a chance of brokering peace; now we are part of breaking it,'" Mr Andren said.

**For more information: 02 6277 2341 or 0419 612 891. Original motion & suspension motion attached.**