

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Pauses needed on refugees, jets

It was Benjamin Franklin who once said: 'Take time for all things: great haste makes great waste.'

That was true back in Franklin's time and it's equally true today, which is why Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is being so foolish by slavishly promoting a Dec. 31 deadline to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada.

It would be one thing if we were talking about rescuing people who are currently under siege or bombardment in the Middle Eastern war zone. But we're not. The pool of refugees coming to Canada are now living in UN-monitored refugee camps, where most have been there for years.

Waiting another few months won't make things better. It could make it worse for them, at least in the short term.

Yes, there is that Liberal election promise to bring them all in by the end of the year. And yes, we don't always find newly elected governments doing what they say they were going to do and we should generally be pleased to learn that they actually meant what they promised.

But there's politics, and there's reality. And given the tragedy of Paris ? not to mention Mali and numerous other terrorist-inspired outrages against humanity ? I suspect that few Canadians, even those who voted for Justin Trudeau, would be upset if he took a moment to pause on two fronts: the refugee pledge, and the even more troublesome decision to remove our jets from the fight against ISIS.

A Toronto Star headline last week on a Forum Research poll declared that '51 per cent oppose bringing Syrians here.'

Actually, the poll didn't show that at all. What it showed was they were against meeting this artificial ? and strictly political ? deadline. Most Canadians ? me included ? have no problem with bringing in 25,000 refugees. We need more people. They need a home. So why not?

But why take them out of their warm climate and plop them down in a military base in the middle of a frigid winter, rather than wait until all our ducks are in order? Bringing in refugees involves a lot more than just flying people here. There's things like decent housing, language training and all sorts of considerations before you can reasonably expect people to adopt to a new and completely foreign country. Why hurry?

As you'd expect, of course, many who question the wisdom of the politically inspired promise are risking being subjected to the usual small ?l? liberal tactic of being branded a bigot.

A Star interview last week with newly elected Parkdale-High Park Liberal MP Arif Virani ? whose family arrived here after fleeing the murderous Idi Amin in 1972 ? resorts to demonizing those who are questioning Trudeau's plan.

'To be blunt,' said Virani. 'There will always be an element in Canada that . . . are somewhat intolerant.'

This, of course, is true. But there's as much intolerance on the left ? arguably more ? routinely unleashed against those who dare to differ.

But the more important point here is that just because somebody is worried about rushing the refugees in without due process ? and no matter what they claim, that can't really be accomplished in a few weeks ? does not mean they are bigots or are against bringing in refugees at all. No doubt some are. But I'm absolutely confident that most Canadians would have no problem bringing in refugees if they were assured that the genuine security issues and other matters are dealt with beforehand.

After all, on a per capita basis ? and yes, even under the dreaded Tories ? Canada has long brought in more people than any country in the world and the vast majority of Canadians, obviously, aren't upset with that reality.

On the question of yanking our jet fighters out of the fight ? at a time post-Paris when all our allies are motivated to step up the fight ? this again makes no sense beyond the raw politics of an election promise.

I always understood ? but disagreed with ? the NDP position that Canada shouldn't be involved militarily at all in that fight. But I don't get Trudeau's half-pregnant notion of yes, we'll get more involved by sending in 'advisors' while at the same time getting less involved by pulling out our jet fighters.

And for those worried about Canadian casualties, Trudeau's plan for boots on the ground puts Canadians at far greater risk than keeping our fighters in the air.

Trudeau claims he won the election and therefore has a mandate. Fair enough, except on the question of pulling out the jets, every public opinion poll shows a healthy majority of Canadians disagreed with him. He didn't win the election on that issue. He won despite it.

So why not just cool his jets for a while, do things properly, and avoid regrets down the road?

