

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Government's position against ISIS is incoherent?

ISIS continues to be a serious global threat.

Our previous government took clear, decisive action against ISIS by contributing to air strikes. However, the current government has waffled back and forth between, on the one hand, stating that Canada would cease all air strikes as part of the coalition against ISIS in Iraq and Syria by Feb. 22, 2016, while on the other hand, announcing that Canada will be deploying four Canadian Air Force Griffon helicopters to northern Iraq. Such actions not only demonstrate the current government's incoherent strategy in the region, but also its lack of transparency to Canadians; a principle this Government campaigned on during last year's election. Canadians expect and deserve full transparency from their government, including a clear plan on Canada's role in combating ISIS.

The official opposition continues to believe Canada should maintain its air-combat role in the fight against ISIS and terrorism and that our CF-18s should remain in the fight. Operation Impact was the previous government's contribution to reducing and stopping ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The air strikes resulting from the mission have provided much-needed air support for the troops who are battling ISIS on the ground. Since the operation began, Canada's CF-18s have conducted nearly 250 bombing missions, striking multiple targets on most missions (as of Feb. 3). These successful strikes have included 249 against ISIS fighting positions; 83 against ISIS equipment and vehicles; and 24 against ISIS improvised explosive device factories and storage facilities.

The previous government also provided considerable humanitarian, development and security/stabilization assistance to the region by committing close to \$1 billion since 2012. In Iraq, the previous government (since 2014), working with humanitarian partners, committed a total of \$107.4 million in humanitarian assistance for Iraqis affected by violence. In Syria, between 2012 and 2015, the previous government committed \$503.5 million in international humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis in the country. Furthermore, Sept. 12, 2015, the previous government also announced the creation of the Syria Emergency Relief Fund, whereby the government would match every dollar donated by individual Canadians, capped at \$100 million. In Jordan, the previous government provided approximately \$385 million between 2012 and 2015.

The current government's decision to withdraw from the combat mission is a huge step backwards after the considerable contributions and efforts made by the previous government, as well as for Canada's long-standing role as a defender of human rights and international security. Our country has always taken tremendous pride in standing up for innocent and vulnerable populations by confronting those who commit mass atrocities.

We must remember that ISIS and ISIS-inspired attacks have spread beyond Iraq and Syria, and have claimed the lives of Canadians in recent weeks. Therefore, halting and degrading ISIS is more important than ever to keep people safe. ISIS has also declared war on Canada and our allies. It is critical that the government of Canada stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies to defend and protect the safety of Canadians both here and abroad. Canada has the capacity to contribute to air strikes alongside training and humanitarian support. Our Canadian Armed Forces personnel have been doing this quite effectively for nearly a year. President Barack Obama has also said air strikes are a key pillar in this fight.

Canada has been a key ally in the air-combat effort; in fact the fifth largest contributor. It is extremely irresponsible for the current government to not only downplay Canada's contribution, but to whittle it down for political purposes and then to announce that Canada will deploy four Royal Canadian Air Force Griffon helicopters to northern Iraq, as part of Canada's contribution to the anti-ISIS mission. Canadians are left wondering what Canada's role in the mission really is as a result of this incoherent strategy. They also question the transparency of their government when the motion brought before the Parliament Feb. 11 made no mention of the deployment of the four Griffon helicopters.

It's time for the current government to stand up for Canadians here at home and abroad, as well as for innocent and vulnerable populations by maintaining Canada's air combat role in the fight against ISIS and terrorism. Canadians also deserve a transparent government. This is the type of representation Canadians received under the previous government and should continue to receive nothing less from the current government.

