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An unfocused, unending combat mission in Iraq and Syria

Dear editor:

The Conservative government is asking Canadians to support their plan to extend and deepen an unfocused, unending combat mission in Iraq and expand it to Syria.

But they have failed to make the case.

The government has failed to articulate clear and transparent objectives for the mission, nor a responsible plan to achieve them. As a result, Canadians will have no way to know if we have achieved our goals. And there is no exit strategy beyond an illusory end date set for next March.

By expanding the combat mission to Syria, Canada risks consolidating Bashar al-Assad's power over the country. Mr. al-Assad has oppressed and terrorized his own people, used chemical weapons on them, and been responsible for torturing and killing many more innocent people than ISIL. Asked who would take over that Syrian territory if ISIL were removed, Canada's Defence Minister responded ?I don't know how this is going to end.?

According to the United Nations, all-out-war has driven 11 million Syrians from their homes and killed over 210,000. The exodus of refugees is causing a humanitarian crisis.

Beyond this dubious alliance, expanding Canada's presence into Syria represents a worrying trend?the same trend that saw our military sent into ground combat operations, despite the Prime Minister's explicit assurance this would not happen. Whether you call it evolution, escalation or mission creep, the pattern is the same.

Government Ministers have explicitly compared the duration of Canada's mission in Iraq and now Syria to our involvement in Afghanistan, stating that we are in it for the longer term. In Afghanistan, the longer term meant a decade.

Their approach ignores very important contributions that would degrade ISIL by bringing real stability to the region. Efforts aimed at building strong governance and security structures, as well as alleviating the refugee crisis that is overwhelming neighbouring countries--which can only lead to further destabilization. These just happen to be the kind of things Canada is very good at doing.

Canada has a clear interest in training Iraqi forces to fight and destroy ISIL. We can ? and should ? do this training away from the front lines, as our allies have been doing, and as we were told we would be doing as well.

Let there be no doubt that our men and women in uniform have our full support as they continue their dangerous work, in this complex and volatile part of the world.

But the Liberal Party cannot support the government's plan. The mission has been presented in a non-transparent manner, with no clear objectives or goals, no plan to bring long term stability to the region or address the humanitarian crisis and fails to leverage Canada's expertise and strengths.

Joyce Murray, MP

Liberal Party of Canada Defence Critic