



VETERAN VOICE.INFO

Feature: Justin Trudeau and Sacred Obligation

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PERIODICAL - Oct 2016

Issue No: 201672

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VVi is for you, all veterans, regardless of whether you belong to a veteran organization or not. VVi is a distribution centre, a conduit for making sure that the information you need as a veteran is there for you in a timely fashion. Our aim is to provide a forum for *all* Canadian veterans, serving members and their families to have access to information pertaining to veteran rights.

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Justin Trudeau and Sacred Obligation

Perry Grey
Chief Editor VeteranVoice.info (VVi)

“You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” Abraham Lincoln

“in politics, perception was everything -- something this latest generation of Liberals seems to have forgotten.” Keith Beardsley, Conservative adviser

“If you can’t afford to take care of your veterans, then don’t go to war” Senator Bernie Sanders

“The "but the last government did it" line is getting over used... enough people were unhappy with how the previous government worked to elect a "new" government, so why does the new government feel it is okay to keep doing what the previous one did?

Just because it was done a certain way in the past doesn't mean people feel it should still be done that way... it is 2016 after all!” Anonymous Canadian

Sunny ways my friend....Sunny ways!!!!!! Voted for Change....Got much of the Same!!!!!! It must be inherit habit for the federal governments to attack Veterans and Natives!!!!!! It seems that once a politician steps on the hill their moral compass somehow leaves their body!!!!!! I must admit that the current Federal government as been very long on talk but very short on walk!!!!!! Anonymous Canadian

Whether at home or abroad, uniformed citizens are vested with great responsibility through the devolution of trust by their government and their fellow citizens. Their values, as indoctrinated to reflect those of our society, must be their first guidance, and it must be reflected in their application of legal norms. (<http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol12/no1/06-rouillard-eng.asp>)

One Veteran suggested that we can enjoy a variant of the old drinking game by drinking every time that Kent Hehr says mandate. We can also do the same every time the Prime Minister says sacred obligation...or sunny ways.

If you are interested, then you can see all of the times that the Prime Minister said “sacred obligation”:

<https://openparliament.ca/politicians/justin-trudeau/>

His use of sacred obligation extends to aboriginal Canadians as well:

"It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations peoples, one that understands that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of First Nations in Canada are not an inconvenience but rather a sacred obligation," 8 December 2015

The Prime Minister used the term in his mandate letter to Kent Hehr:

“our government lives up to our sacred obligation to veterans and their families”

He also wrote:

We have promised Canadians a government that will bring real change...I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa...also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government...

How is doing exactly what the previous government did an indication that the Prime Minister is fulfilling his promises?

It will be argued in the near future by lawyers and constitutional experts that the Prime Minister must honour his promises. This is not limited to the Equitas Class Action, instead everything that the Prime Minister promised to Veterans, Aboriginals and other Canadians.

But why do Canadians have to resort to legal options to ensure that its governments honour their promises? We should not have to fight particularly as the governments have deep pockets thanks to our tax dollars! As several journalists observed this is a form of bullying, which should not be tolerated.

So what is a binding promise? I checked Canadian law for a definition:

“a contract is a legally binding promise...a contract legally entered into represents a legal bond between the parties. Parties are free to contract whenever and for whatever reason they wish. The only limits to absolute contractual freedom are certain restrictions imposed by legislation and by accepted ethics.

To be valid and therefore legally binding, 5 conditions must be met:

- * First, there must be the mutual consent of both parties. No one can be held to a promise involuntarily made. When consent is given by error, under physical or moral duress, or as a result of fraudulent practises, the contract may be declared null and void at the request of the aggrieved party. In certain types of contractual relationship, the law demands that the consent of the party be both free and informed. This is the case, for instance, with contracts involving medical treatment.

- * The second is contractual capacity - the mental ability to keep the promise one has made. A young child, a person suffering from a serious mental disorder and sometimes even a minor are all considered incapable of contracting.

- * The third condition is that the contract should have an object or a purpose; it must concern a specific and agreed-upon good or service.

- * The fourth condition is "lawful cause" in civil law or a "valuable consideration" in common law. In this area, important technical differences exist between the 2 legal systems. Briefly, however, according to this fourth condition, the promise made must be serious and each obligation assumed by one of the parties must find a corresponding, but not necessarily equivalent or equal, promise made by the other party. A person may thus legally sell goods at a price that does not represent their actual market value. The contract would still be a valid one.

- * The fifth condition, which is not required in all cases, is the compliance in certain circumstances to formalities provided by law such as, for instance, a valid written instrument. In general, this condition holds for contracts that may have serious consequences for the parties, or those for which certain measures of publicity are

required.

Sanctions

Parties to a valid contract are always bound by law to carry out their promise. Should they fail to, the other party is free to go to court to force them to comply. At times, the court may order the defaulting party to do exactly what he has promised (specified promise). In that respect, civil law provides more readily for the forced execution of promises than common law, for which specific performance is still an exception to the rule.

Courts may also award financial compensation in the form of damages equal in value to the loss suffered and profits lost as a result of the breach of contract, but this loss and profit must be directly related to the nonfulfillment of promise (article 1611 QCC). Furthermore, courts award only damages equivalent to those benefits that the parties might reasonably have expected to receive at the time the agreement was entered into.

Increasingly, provincial and federal legislatures are acting to protect citizens against certain abusive commercial practices.”

I suggest that the last statement be expanded to include abusive political practices such as those committed by every level of government in Canada!

So what is a contract? It is a written or spoken agreement that is intended to be enforceable by law.

If the sacred obligation is not a legal contract, then why should Veterans honour their “unlimited liability” after all most Canadians do everything to avoid such a predicament as stated in car, health, mortgage, income and life insurance policies, and incorporation and employment contracts with the many non-competes, non-disclosures, and other limited clauses. You name it and lawyers will include limitations.

And delete “universality of service” (liable to perform general military duties and common defence and security duties, not just the duties of their military occupation or occupational specification. This may include, but is not limited to, the requirement to be physically fit, employable and deployable for general operational duties) because this also reflects an unfair employment requirement. Canada makes all kinds of exceptions (notwithstanding) - cultural, social, religious, physical and mental. Generally, employers are discouraged by law from refusing to hire people for such exceptions.

Not every Veteran is expected to do the most strenuous of duties which represent the principle of “soldier first” as stated in DAOD 5023-0, Universality of Service. So every Veteran should ignore their termination notice while the Prime Minister ignores his “sacred obligation” and other contractual obligations. After all no Canadian is above the law.

One only has to do an Internet search to find the many times that “sacred obligation” has been (ab)used by the Liberal Party. Here are some examples in the last two years:

Liberal Policy Resolution 33 (2015):

BE IT RESOLVED THAT a future Liberal government will uphold the principles of this social covenant in its defence and veterans policies, and will live up to our country’s sacred obligation to care for veterans and their families throughout their lives by allowing them to maintain a quality of life that is worthy of the sacrifices that they have made for Canada

“Upholding the social covenant and sacred obligation with our veterans is something that hits close to home for me. I spent 35 years of my life working and serving alongside our servicemen and women, and I am intimately aware of the very real and dangerous challenges they face on a daily basis. These brave women and men represent the very best of what it means to be Canadian.”

Andrew Leslie (retired general and Liberal MP) 25 August 2015

A Liberal government will honour the sacred obligation we have towards Canada’s veterans and their families. Justin Trudeau 23 August 2015 (Facebook)

We have a sacred obligation to our veterans, but @pmharper chose this Minister who made major cuts and closed service centres. Justin Trudeau (Twitter) 11:17 AM - 5 Jan 2015

“live up to our sacred obligation to veterans and end this court battle” Justin Trudeau to Stephen Harper 2015

“Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, I put forward a mandate letter for our Minister of Veterans Affairs that asked him to respect the sacred obligation we have as a country toward those who serve.” Justin Trudeau April 20, 2016 (House of Commons)

“Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign and in the years leading up to last fall's campaign, the Liberal Party always stood by veterans. It has always been there for them, fighting for their interests. Because of its political objectives and its approach to managing the public service, the previous government was unable to serve our veterans properly.” Justin Trudeau April 20, 2016 (House of Commons)

Why is Trudeau kicking veterans to the curb?

Tasha Kheiriddin iPolitics, May 19, 2016

No, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shouldn’t have lost his cool in the House of Commons the other day. When a vote didn’t proceed fast enough for his liking, Trudeau morphed into a spoiled toddler who wanted his toy RIGHT NOW, rushing the floor, grabbing one opposition MP and elbowing another. Despite the PM’s apologies, it remains a bully moment that cast a shadow over his party’s ‘sunny ways’.

Unfortunately, it’s also overshadowing the far more serious instance of bullying that the Liberals are inflicting on Canadian veterans. This week, the government chose to revive the Harper government’s efforts to shut down a class action lawsuit launched by six war veterans against the federal government.

The vets claimed the Tories were discriminating against combatants in modern-day conflicts, such as Afghanistan, by offering them lump-sum payments, rather than the life-long pensions paid to veterans of older conflicts, such as the Korean War. The issue cost the Conservatives support

among veterans' groups — a traditional base of support — and became a black eye for a government that loved to play up the importance of Canada's military.

In June 2015 the two sides called a truce, with the government staying the lawsuit to allow the plaintiffs to determine whether further changes to compensation would satisfy their concerns. That truce has now expired, and when the two sides could not reach an out-of-court settlement, the new Liberal government decided to revive the legal argument the previous government was trying to use to scuttle the lawsuit — that the federal government has no 'sacred covenant' with veterans.

Which, of course, makes a mockery of the explicit promise in the Liberals' campaign platform: "We will demonstrate the respect and appreciation for our veterans that Canadians rightly expect, and ensure that no veteran has to fight the government for the support and compensation they have earned."

The Liberal platform further stated that the federal government has "a social covenant with all veterans and their families that we must meet with both respect and gratitude." That echoes a resolution put forward last year by NDP MP Fin Donnelly, and adopted unanimously by all parties: "That Canadians recognize that the federal government has a moral, social, legal and fiduciary obligation to the women and men who courageously serve our country."

Recognizing this obligation was crucial, because government lawyers had argued in court that "at no time in Canada's history has any alleged 'social contract' or 'social covenant' having the attributes pleaded by the plaintiffs been given effect in any statute, regulation or as a constitutional principle written or unwritten."

Trudeau himself refuted this argument, both inside the House of Commons and on the campaign trail. "For ten years, Stephen Harper draped himself in the Canadian flag, then betrayed the men and women who fought for it," he said. "Our servicemen and women, who have put their lives on the line for their country, stand for the very best of what it means to be Canadian. We have a social covenant with all veterans and their families — a sacred obligation we must meet with both respect and gratitude."

The decision to block the lawsuit again has left veterans' groups in a state of utter shock. "It's a betrayal," veterans lawyer Donald Sorochan told CBC News. "They have turned the Liberal election campaign into a lie. I sat at tables (during the campaign) with some of the people who are now in cabinet. Those ministers have been turned into liars by the Department of Justice."

Why are the Liberals going back on their word? No one — not the prime minister, not the Justice Department, not Minister of Veterans Affairs Kent Hehr — is offering an explanation. When questioned about the decision in the House of Commons, Hehr stated he is committed to treating veterans "with care, compassion and respect," according to CTV News, adding that "Budget 2016 had delivered on a lot of those items, including financial security for many of our most disabled veterans."

But that's not what the Liberals promised. They are, in fact, doing the exact opposite of what they promised — forcing veterans to fight for just compensation in a court battle that could drag on for years.

That's bullying, plain and simple — and Canadians shouldn't stand for it. Trudeau should reverse the decision to appeal, even if it means another mea culpa on the floor of the House.

Liberals accused of breaking promise to uphold 'sacred obligation' to veterans

CTV News May 20, 2016

The New Democrats and Conservatives are accusing the Liberals of breaking their election promise to uphold a 'sacred obligation to veterans,' after the justice department moved forward with a court case that would give the government the option of denying lifelong pensions to injured soldiers.

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair accused the Liberals during daily question period in the House of Commons of "trying to stop (veterans) from getting the benefits they deserve," despite "campaigning on a black-and-white promise to end the Conservative court case against veterans."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded that "veterans who have served this country extraordinarily well deserve more than people trying to play politics on their backs."

"Veterans across this country know that in Budget 2016 we put forward historic measures that will fix the 10 years of neglect," Trudeau added.

Former veterans affairs minister Erin O'Toole -- whose government came to an agreement with the plaintiffs of the lawsuit last June, putting it on hold until this month -- accused Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould Wednesday of "attacking veterans" and allowing a "truce" to "fall apart."

"The prime minister promised to uphold the sacred obligation our country owes to our veterans," O'Toole said, "yet his justice minister has turned her lawyers on veterans."

Quebec Conservative MP Alupa Clarke also accused the Liberals of breaking promises. "The Minister of Veterans Affairs appears two-faced," he said.

Veterans Affairs Minister Kent Hehr responded by saying that he is committed to treating veterans "with care, compassion and respect."

"Budget 2016 had delivered on a lot of those items, including financial security for many of our most disabled veterans," the minister added.

Ottawa should fulfil its 'sacred' duty to veterans: Editorial

Toronto Star June 14, 2016

Never has there been a crasser distillation of Ottawa's skewed sense of its moral duty to those who have fought, and been injured, for this country than an argument put forward by government lawyers in 2012. In an effort to block a class-action lawsuit by six injured Afghan war veterans, the attorneys argued that the federal government has no "sacred obligation" to ex-soldiers, that Parliament is in no way constitutionally constrained in its judgment of how much, or how little, compensation they deserve.

The Conservatives continued in this dubious legal fight for years, costing Ottawa some \$700,000 in the process, until political circumstances forced them to change tack. In the lead-up to last year's federal election, beset by critics, the Harper government finally delivered an overdue boost to Ottawa's grossly inadequate veterans' benefits.

It even tabled a bill, which eventually passed, recognizing the government's "sacred obligation" to Canada's men and women in uniform. The plaintiffs agreed to stay proceedings until May 2016, at

which point they would determine whether sufficient progress had been made to drop the action altogether.

When the Liberals won the election, the case appeared destined for amicable settlement. In opposition, Justin Trudeau had called for the government “to live up to our sacred obligation, end this court battle, and start giving our veterans the help they deserve.” As prime minister, Trudeau reiterated this sentiment in his mandate letter to Veterans Affairs Minister Kent Hehr, calling on him to ensure that the “government lives up to our sacred obligation to veterans.”

Strange, then, if not utterly bewildering, that government lawyers will reportedly resume their appeal this week on the grounds that Ottawa has no sacred obligation to veterans. Yes, believe it or not, the Trudeau government wants the court to acknowledge that Ottawa does not have a duty it has argued repeatedly and persuasively that it has.

The truce came undone over a Liberal campaign promise, restated in Hehr’s mandate letter, to “re-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured veterans.” The controversial 2006 New Veterans Charter mostly replaced pensions with lump-sum payments. But many have argued this unfairly disadvantages ex-soldiers who live longer, and that veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are ill-equipped to manage the large one-time payouts.

Despite the Liberal commitment, there was no mention of veterans’ pensions in the federal budget. As the deadline for deciding the fate of the lawsuit approached, the plaintiffs asked the government to commit to a timeline for implementing its promises. But lawyers representing the injured ex-soldiers say Hehr refused, giving them no choice but to continue with the action.

For his part, Hehr says the Liberals merely inherited this lawsuit. “I find it deeply regrettable that, under the former government, veterans had to take this step to ensure their well-being,” he told the Globe and Mail on Monday. No mention of why his government refuses to lay out a timetable for delivering on its commitments. Or why it appears to have permitted its lawyers to pursue a line of argument in direct contradiction of its long-held, proudly touted position.

The costs of the best possible care for our veterans should be built into any decision that puts soldiers in harm’s way.

That’s the duty Trudeau invoked when he called on the Harper government to “end this court battle, and start giving our veterans the help they deserve.” Whether Ottawa finally fulfils that obligation, or continues its shameful history of dereliction, is now his to decide.

NATION RE-BUILDING: TRUDEAU PROMISES RENEWED RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

• Canadian Bar Association January 27, 2016

A major promise in the Liberal election platform, and repeated in ministerial mandate letters and the throne speech, was to “repair” the relationship between the federal government and the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

In December, the government laid out a plan to start making good on that promise.

"It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations peoples, one that understands that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of First Nations in Canada are not an inconvenience but rather a sacred obligation," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a group of chiefs gathered for an Assembly of First Nations conference in Gatineau.

The first of five priorities for the new government was to launch an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women.

The other four are to:

- Make significant investments in First Nations education
- Lift the two per cent cap on funding for First Nations programs
- Implement recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Repeal all legislation unilaterally imposed on indigenous people by the previous government

The mandate letter to Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould instructed her to “conduct a review of the changes in our criminal justice system and sentencing reforms over the past decade ... Outcomes of this process should include increased use of restorative justice processes and other initiatives to reduce the rate of incarceration amongst indigenous Canadians...”

She was also instructed to work with other relevant ministers to “address gaps in services to Aboriginal people and those with mental illness throughout the criminal justice system.”

These points echo several CBA policies, including some resolutions adopted at last summer’s CBA Legal Conference in Calgary which asked the CBA to urge governments to address the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people and to provide culturally appropriate programs for those who are incarcerated; and also to urge the federal government to provide adequate health care for offenders, “with particular emphasis on prison staff receiving training and exercising their duties in a manner that recognizes the needs of offenders with mental health and cognitive difficulties.” As well as those two resolutions, the Aboriginal Law Section co-sponsored, along with the Criminal Justice Section, two more resolutions calling on the government to address the over-use of solitary confinement and to implement systems that will ensure prisoners have “reasonable” contact with counsel, “including comprehensive regulations governing an offender’s right to counsel, access to counsel, communication with counsel and the privileged nature of communications with counsel.”

The CBA has also called for comprehensive measures to address the legacy of Canada’s residential schools.

Carolyn Bennett, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, was told in her mandate letter that her “overarching goal will be to renew the relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. This renewal must be a nation-to-nation relationship, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.”

Among her instructions, Bennett was told to “undertake... a review of laws, policies and operational practices to ensure that the Crown is fully executing its consultation and accommodation obligations, in accordance with its constitutional and international human rights obligations, including Aboriginal and treaty rights.”

Manitoba Justice Murray Sinclair, who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said the prime minister’s leadership on this issue is vital.

“If that comes from the Prime Minister’s Office alone that would be a significant and huge step,” he told the Ottawa Citizen. “Because that would send a message throughout the political system, as well as throughout the federal bureaucracy, that people need to change the way they think about things.”

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as the Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 13 years.



Canada's Peacekeeping Commitment – More Political Rhetoric to Honour Lester B Pearson's Legacy

Perry Grey
Chief Editor VeteranVoice.info (VVi)

“The grim fact is that we prepare for war like precocious giants, and for peace like retarded pygmies.
Politics is the skilled use of blunt objects.

As a soldier, I survived World War I when most of my comrades did not.

It has too often been too easy for rulers and governments to incite man to war.

The choice, however, is as clear now for nations as it was once for the individual: peace or extinction.”

Mike Pearson

Mr Pearson, a Liberal, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for organizing the United Nations Emergency Force to resolve the Suez Canal Crisis and supported UN peacekeeping in general. Is his legacy worth maintaining even if Canadians are killed or permanently disabled?

Recently the government announced that it will be increasing its commitments in international peacekeeping. Future operations will have a significant impact on the number of Veterans, who will need support from DND and VAC, after they are wounded or injured.

Before the Liberal government commits Canada to more hazardous missions, may be it should take the time to “get it right”.

VeteranVoice.info does not usually comment on CF operations; however, this will change because of the relationship between military operations and systemic problems in supporting Veterans who are negatively affected by those operations.

Like many currently disabled Veterans, I was “injured” as a result of my participation in peacekeeping missions. As others can confirm, often these missions are very dangerous, particularly if combatants continue to engage in conflict and target Canadian “peacekeepers”.

The decision to commit Canadians to such operations without fully preparing for the consequences is dangerous. No government should be willing to engage in war and

related activities without first ensuring that it can support ALL who are victims of such activities.

Furthermore, Canada should not make any commitment unless it is prepared to pay for better equipment, better training (particularly of non-Canadian personnel), better logistics and better long term support for Veterans and their families.

Retrofitting a mission is not the solution or paying a lump sum to the disabled Veteran.

Canada can never give enough to any operation and if it can not pay the price, then do not commit.

Canada tried to give better support for returning Veterans the end of World War 2 (the old Veterans charter). It was supposed to do the same for Veterans of Afghanistan and other operations with the new Veterans charter. Sadly, Veterans know the difference between the two charters and improper administration by DND and VAC.

The logic should ALWAYS be that if you can not care for Veterans, then you should not commit them to dangerous operations.

Even the US government, with its massive military force, and its 152 VA medical centres and approximately 1400 community-based outpatient clinics, is not providing exceptional support for its Veterans. It is estimated that more than 50,000 US Veterans are homeless. The US Congress has tried to eliminate some problems with the VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act (2016), but many more exist including deplorable health care in VA's many institutions.

By the way, the United States military operations represent about 40 percent of the world's military expenditures. It can afford the best equipment if it wants, so why does it not provide the best health care for its disabled Veterans?

Canadian Veterans have nothing comparable so where will future peacekeepers get their long term care when they are forced out of the CF and RCMP because they are unfit to serve?

They will be competing with other Canadians for limited beds in provincial institutions.

Lest we also forget, the UN believes that its peacekeeping operations have been successful. Well what about Cyprus, which has had a UN mission since 1964. After 52 years, a resolution has not been achieved, but the UN mission gets renewed every six months. If this is how the UN measures success, then is it really effective?

Judge for yourself, by reviewing UN missions:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Canadian_peacekeeping_missions

“We know now that in modern warfare, fought on any considerable scale, there can be no possible economic gain for any side. Win or lose, there is nothing but waste and

destruction.” Mike Pearson

“No state, furthermore, unless it has aggressive military designs such as those which consumed Nazi leaders in the thirties, is likely to divert to defence any more of its resources and wealth and energy than seems necessary.” Mike Pearson

Peacekeeping in Canada’s interest, but reform desperately needed: Romeo Dallaire
Canadian Press September 19, 2016

It is in Canada’s interest to play a leadership role in United Nations peacekeeping, former military commander Romeo Dallaire said Monday even as he delivered a pointed critique of how the world body runs such missions.

The retired senator and lieutenant-general, who famously led the UN’s ill-fated mission in Rwanda more than 20 years ago, told a Senate committee that the world has failed to act on some much-needed reforms when it comes to peacekeeping.

The problems he cited include poor mission planning and the appointment of unqualified military officers and diplomats to lead missions and diplomatic efforts.

But Dallaire said the many conflicts the UN is trying to manage will have an impact on Canada in the form of refugee crises, pandemics and terrorism, and that only by returning to peacekeeping can Canada help strengthen the world body’s ability to respond.

“Those reforms are critical to the future. And I think you can move the yardsticks,” he said after the meeting.

“Don’t go away from the UN. On the contrary, get into entrails of the damn thing and start pulling out some of that stuff.”

Dallaire’s appearance before the Senate committee coincided with the return of Parliament from the summer break. Opposition critics wasted no time criticizing the Liberal government’s plan to commit up to 600 troops to at least one still-unannounced peacekeeping mission.

Interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose accused the government of using Canadian military personnel as “pawns” in its push for a UN Security Council seat, and demanded any future deployment be subject to a debate and vote in the House of Commons.

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, who invited Dallaire to escort him on a tour of peacekeeping operations in East Africa in August, said the government would “welcome a healthy debate.” But he stopped short of saying whether there would be a vote.

While Dallaire voiced strong support for Canada jumping back into peacekeeping, he said there could be challenges beyond simply dealing with the UN. Those include making sure any mission can be deployed and resupplied in a timely manner, and having enough troops to sustain a long-term effort.

“It is simply the fact that there has been mass attrition from the ’90s, and we have never recovered,” he said, in reference to the Chretien government’s decision to cut the military by about one-third in the 1990s. “That is what will limit our options.”

Defence chief Gen. Jonathan Vance told The Canadian Press on the weekend that the military was not recommending any missions that would stretch it too thin. He also said he was comfortable the military could conduct a peacekeeping mission in Africa while operating in the Middle East and Latvia.

While Dallaire was supportive of the Liberal government returning to peacekeeping, he was somewhat critical of its decision to commit only 150 police officers to such efforts. He said the National Police Services advisory council had recommended 600 police officers back when he was a member.

“One-hundred fifty is a good first shot,” he said, “but not enough.”

Editor’s Note: Should Canada get involved in African operations after what happened in Rwanda? The mission suffered a disproportional fatality rate given the number of suicides. Do not forget that Governor-General Michaëlle Jean formally apologised to Rwandans for Canada’s role in the failure to prevent the 1994 genocide. Will Canada have to apologise in the future even if Canadians can not be held directly responsible?

Reality check: Canada commits 600 soldiers, \$450M to UN peacekeeping missions, but do they work?

Global News August 26, 2016

The Liberal government is committing nearly half a billion dollars and up to 600 soldiers toward United Nations peacekeeping operations, signalling Canada’s return to peacekeeping — a role the country was once known for around the world.

Along with the soldiers, equipment such as helicopters and planes will be deployed to peace operations, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion said Friday at a military air base in Bagotville, Que.

“It is time for Canada to choose engagement over isolation,” Dion told reporters. “[It is] time to act with responsible conviction as a determined peace builder.”

Minister of Public Safety Ralph Goodale also announced up to 150 police officers will support various U.N. peace operations.

The announcement means a dramatic increase from the current 19 Canadian troops, 75 police officers and nine military experts participating on peacekeeping missions, according to UN numbers.

Does peacekeeping actually keep the peace?

Walter Dorn, an expert in peacekeeping with Canadian Forces College in Toronto, welcomed the move by the Liberals, adding that Canada has effectively been absent from peacekeeping missions since the early 2000s.

He said the majority of UN peacekeeping efforts have been “effective” and are essential for protecting civilian populations.

“[Peacekeeping] has a very good track record. If you look at over 70 operations, run by

the UN, the vast majority of them have been successful,” Dorn told Global News. “Even the ones that are routinely [called] failures they also made important contributions to peace.”

The 1994 Rwandan genocide that killed an estimated 800,000 to 1 million people and the failure of Dutch peacekeepers to stop the massacre of 8,000 Muslim men in Srebrenica have been seen as low points for peacekeeping efforts.

Other operations like a U.S.-led UN humanitarian operation in Somalia in 1993 and missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone in the 1990s raised questions about the efficacy of peacekeeping.

But even in failure, Dorn says peacekeeping still has a positive impact.

“Gen. Dallaire, for instance in the Rwandan mission, was able to save 20,000-30,000 people with just 300 peacekeepers on the ground,” he said. “Even when the missions are failing to secure the peace they still have a positive impact.”

“Of course peacekeeping is far from perfect and there are limited things you can do to keep people from fighting each other,” Dorn continued. “But I think peacekeeping is an essential component in making securing peace agreements ... and protecting local populations.”

Where are Canadian troops headed?

One big question Friday’s announcement failed to answer is where Canadian troops will be placed. There has been speculation about Canada joining missions in Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Conservative defence critic James Bezan said Friday’s announcement raises more questions than answers and criticized the decision to “blindly” pledge Canadian troops for possible deployment.

“Today’s announcement provides absolutely no details as to where, when or even why our troops will be deployed,” Bezan said in a statement. “The Liberals must answer basic questions such as what will the mission entail? What are the rules of engagement? Who will we be working with? Will there be a vote in Parliament?”

“Instead, all we have learned is that the Liberals are sending almost half a billion dollars to the United Nations, at a time when that investment is desperately needed at home.”

But all four operations raise questions about safety and complex political situations. In Mali 86 peacekeepers have been killed since April 2013.

“Today, peace support operations are conducted where there may be no peace to keep, or where the fragile peace constantly teeters on the edge of violence,” Sajjan said. “We need to understand conflict better. We need to look at the root cause of conflict, and think of innovative ways to move forward.”

Dion said Canada cannot turn away from the “complex” political entanglements of certain countries.

“Canadians are aware that our brave men and women in uniform [will come] into tough situations, but Canadians are proud of it,” he told reporters. “It’s for the protection of Canada and of the world that we cannot be absent of the peace operation missions.”

Five questions left unanswered following Canada’s peacekeeping commitment

Four ministers promised new funding and troops for peace operations in Africa last week. Was it an announcement or a placeholder?

Steve Saideman

opencanada.org August 30, 2016

Some perspective for Canada’s “new” United Nations (UN) “commitment.”

These are not scare quotes — as if these things are supposed to be scary. Nope, I am raising the question of how real these commitments are. In short, last week, several cabinet ministers committed to spending more money on peacekeeping (\$450 million), which is fine, and to setting aside 600 troops to be deployed someday in UN operations. This, again, is fine, but the lofty rhetoric and the announcement made by not one, not two, but four cabinet ministers about Canada being back is a bit much.

I get it that this government had to make some kind of commitment so that, it appears, Canada would be invited to a major conference in London in two weeks focusing on peacekeeping. I also get it that the Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, had to say something after spending some very visible time checking out a series of potential missions in Africa recently.

But no decisions of any consequence were made or announced. What kinds of details will I now be looking for?

1. Distribution of troops

The first obvious one to ask is: Will that be 600 troops in one spot or will they be divided over five or 20 spots? If one spot, then we can ask different questions than if five or 20. If one, what is the mission? What are the goals of the effort? Will Canada lead the entire effort or a regional piece of the larger effort? If many missions, what does Canada hope to achieve?

Yes, Canada can provide "enablers" who are force multipliers — they make everyone else more effective. But that usually is going to be in a role where the Canadians would have little in the way of leadership posts or influence. There are tradeoffs between going big and focused or small and many, and we have yet no clue about what tradeoff.

2. Location of missions

The second question, which the media is focused on, is where? Almost all of the focus has been on various ongoing missions in Africa. Lots of these missions are not going well, so perhaps a Canadian deployment can make a difference by changing what the mission is doing or adding a particularly effective unit. Of course, as the military always says, reinforce success, not failure, as pouring troops and material into a failure (the Somme, for instance) is not good.

3. Explaining the Colombia omission

This leads to the third question: why not Colombia? There is now an agreement to enforce. Unlike Mali, Colombia has not (as far as I know) experienced much in the way of suicide bombers. The Colombia peace may not be easy to enforce, but it will be not nearly as hard as helping France out in Mali. Do we want to be helping the French out in an Islamic country at a time when French politicians are outbidding each other to discriminate against Muslims? Just curious.

4. Time to drop the "Canada is Back" rhetoric

The rhetoric of being "back" is kind of silly if the number is 600. That is roughly the size of what Canada did in East Timor and in Haiti in the 2000s, but Canada was doing more than one mission at a time before it mostly got out of the UN business. So, this would be more than what former Prime Minister Stephen Harper was doing, but much less than what Jean Chretien was doing.

A battalion — the military unit closest to 600 — is the basic minimal deployable unit. It is, in some ways, the least one can do. Maybe Canada is stretched by the forthcoming Latvia mission and the ongoing Iraq training effort, but Canada did manage to send 3,000 troops to combat in Kandahar and send a battalion or so of peacekeepers to Haiti. So, Canada could do more, but it would cost money.

5. An honest assessment of 'whole of government'

Finally, the announcement invoked "whole of government" — in other words, this effort will involve multiple agencies working together. As I criticized in my book on the Afghanistan mission, this whole of government thing is over-rated.

Agencies don't play well together, and it requires intense attention by the Prime Minister himself to make sure that the agencies cooperate much at all.

Does this promise to do "whole of government" mean that Canada's development aid will switch to whatever mission that is ultimately chosen? What does that mean for Global Affairs and the ongoing review of international assistance efforts? Some missions would not need much "whole of government" at all (Colombia) and others might need a good bit more. And, please, don't be too nostalgic for how wonderful Canada's "whole of government" effort was in Afghanistan. Other countries admired it, but they were starting from a low basis of comparison (their own whole of government efforts).

Overall, the point here is that what Canada is doing thus far is being oversold. The stuff that was announced on Aug. 26 is significant and welcome, but the rhetoric is over the top for a decision that is mostly about delaying a decision.

This is a very big roll-out for a placeholder — 'we will be making decisions, not just today.' OK, thanks.

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