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Feature: Commitments and Contradictions

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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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Commitments and Contradictions

Perry Gray

“ Many a politician wishes there was a law to burn old records.” Will Rogers

Voters need to understand the definitions of the terms used by politicians if the voters want to truly understand what a politician is saying. Take for example the first word in the title of this article commitment. It can mean pledge or undertaking and voters often assume (wrongly) that politicians intend to take action and work to implement their commitments. What commitment means (actually) is referring a matter to a legislative committee. This definition is the

fifth under commit in the Oxford Concise Dictionary, which is usually the dictionary of choice for the CF. While the military is encouraged to use the first definition in the dictionary, this same principle does not apply to politicians.

The outcome can often result in frustration when voters believe that politicians have been misleading in their future plans. While a politician may commit to freezing taxes, after discussions in committee, it may be necessary to raise taxes. Voters must then pay the higher taxes because it is unlawful not to pay taxes regardless of what the politicians committed to do during an election campaign.

Voters know that politicians are often accused of saying anything to get elected and then saying different things to stay elected. This brings me to the second word contradiction.

Politicians do not lie, they may contradict themselves or so it might seem, but it is usually more about misinterpretation. Often their words are used without the proper context, which is very common these days because too much information is reduced to a very limited amount or a "sound bite". They are very popular in the media and political advertising, but because sound bites are limited, they can easily be misunderstood or inaccurate.

Of interest to the Veterans Community is the news that the federal government has spent almost \$700,000 in its legal case with Equitas. Some Veterans are angered that once again tax dollars are being "squandered" instead of benefiting the Veterans Community (or other Canadians besides lawyers). The federal government justifies its actions by stating that it should not be held accountable for a verbal commitment made by Sir Robert Borden, a Conservative Party prime minister, in 1917.

"Although never explicitly codified in law, that pledge has guided the country's policy towards veterans for decades. The government's apparent attempt to abandon it has been central to the recent unrest among veterans." (Canadian Press 28 January 2015)

I can not provide any insight into this legal matter because I am neither lawyer nor expert. I can ask why the government's logic is not applied to the status of the NVC, which is the legislation which Equitas is challenging as being unfair.

"The government is defending a decision of the previous government, supported by all parties in the House of Commons," Stephen Harper (Canadian Press 28 January 2015)

So the prime minister is unwilling to abide by a commitment made by a fellow Conservative, but is willing to defend legislation introduced by a Liberal prime minister. Is this not a very large contradiction?

As stated many times since the introduction of the NVC in 2006, the prime minister could have either amended it so that Equitas's complaints are resolved or find another option. How many times does the Veterans Community have to remind the prime minister of the hundreds of recommendations that his government has not yet implemented?

Prime Minister Harper also committed the CF to another combat mission last year, which is now being contradicted. This is the employment of CF special forces in ground combat operations against ISIS/ISIL.

"Canadian soldiers are not accompanying the Iraqi forces into combat, Harper told the House of Commons on Sept. 30. Harper has continually insisted the troops would not be involved in a combat role." (Post Media 21 January 2015)

I do know a little bit about combat operations as a former army officer. Even with the more restrictive rules of engagement, which are often imposed by politicians, if a soldier is doing more than defending him/herself, then it is an offensive combat action. The role of Canadian infantry is "to close with, and destroy the enemy" (Canadian Forces Publication B-GL-392-001/FP-001 *The Infantry Battalion in Battle*, Volume 1).

"Retired major-general Lewis MacKenzie said senior military staff are "dancing on the head of a pin" in supporting the government's definition.

"It's fair for them to have their own definition, but that is not the definition of combat," said MacKenzie, who commanded troops in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. "If you are somewhat close to the enemy and they're firing at you and you're firing back with deadly effect, that is combat." (Post Media 21 January 2015)

It is therefore understandable that the opposition has criticised the prime minister. The CF mission has evolved from advising and assisting Iraqi (and Kurdish) forces to accompanying them on operations.

About the only thing that is clear to me is that there is difference in definitions used although the same words are being used. Thus same words, but very different meanings.

In principle, I am not opposed to the traditional employment of the CF. I trained to fight, but spent much of my career involved in peacekeeping. Despite serving during the Cold War, I was accustomed to the more passive role played by the CF in its many peacekeeping operations. This was the traditional role of the CF since the end of WW2. I consider the combat operations in Afghanistan and now Iraq (and Syria) as significant contradictions to the peacekeeping tradition. That said, I was also aware that there is a difference between peacemaking and peacekeeping. The Korean War is a good example of peacemaking in accordance with UN policy. Other UN missions in which Canada has been involved tend to be more about peacekeeping.

What frustrates me frequently is that politicians switch between commitments without pausing to consider the many contradictions that they create. This defies the sage motto "keep it simple, stupid". In Iraq, the RCAF is actively involved in combat operations as first envisioned by the federal government before any missions were flown; however, CF special forces were to be committed to non-combat operations. It would have been much simpler to commit all CF personnel to one type or the other.

It would also be appropriate that the federal government honour the commitment made in 1917 when Prime Minister Borden acknowledged the sacrifices of Canadian troops because the current prime minister is also willing to sacrifice Canadian troops in a foreign war. This is in keeping with Canadian legal and ethical practices.

As an economist, Stephen Harper may be familiar with the business philosophy of "you break it, you bought it". Canadian courts will hold the shopper liable if negligence is proven. Committing CF special forces to combat operations when they are assigned non-combat roles, could be viewed as negligence in my opinion.

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as both Publisher and Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 12 years.



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Veteran's Aide Memoire

http://veteranvoice.info/archive/aide_memoire/Vet_Aide_Memoire.pdf

[National \(US\) Gulf War Resources Center, Inc.](http://www.ngwrc.org/)

<http://www.ngwrc.org/>



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Volunteer Patricia Program (VPP)**

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>



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Clawback**

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<http://seanbruyea.com>



<https://www.cfpsa.com/Splashpages/SoldierOn/>



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<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/>

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Veterans Emergency
Transition Services

<http://www.vetscanada.org/>



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Wounded Warriors Fund

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