

COMMENT

Then and Now



St. John's United Church, Guelph St. The stunning structure still stands with little visual difference. A wonderful representation of preserved heritage in Georgetown. The original photo was taken around 1940.

Now photo credit Amy Douglas/Then photo Esquesing Historical Society

Grits must tell the truth

Nearly two years ago, in January 2015, Justin Trudeau stood in the House of Commons as leader of the Liberal Party and an opposition MP, and accused the previous government of misleading Canadians on its air combat mission against the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. After an incident where Canadian troops exchanged gunfire with IS in act of self defence, Trudeau chastised the government for engaging in what he described as a ground combat mission.

At the time, under the U.S.-led coalition against IS, Canada had deployed six CF-18 fighter jets, two surveillance planes, an aerial refueling tanker, and 69 Canadian soldiers on the ground in Iraq to train Kurdish forces. The previous government took an aerial combat approach because air strikes were highly effective at combatting IS and minimized the risk to troops.

During the election later that year, Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party pledged to scale back Canada's role in the fight against IS, and withdraw Canada's CF-18 fighter jets from the combat mission.

Shortly after being elected, the Liberals presented their plan. While they removed the CF-18s, the Liberals added four Griffon helicopters and extended the role of Canada's aerial refueling tanker to refuel the coalition fighter jets that are conducting air strikes. The Liberals also tripled the number of Canadian soldiers in northern Iraq and Syria, from 69 to over 200. They drastically expanded the same mission that they denounced less than a year earlier.

Even Canada's Chief of Defence Staff, General Jonathan Vance, acknowledged that withdrawing from

the air combat mission and replacing it with a larger army contingent increased the risks for Canadian troops. He said it's fair to assume that the risks will increase and that the new mission is riskier overall. He also confirmed that Canadian soldiers have been given authorization to shoot first.

In more recent weeks, as the operation to free Mosul the last remaining major city in Iraq under IS control intensified, photographs emerged on Twitter showing Canadian special forces soldiers near Iraq's front lines, riding in heavily armed Humvees and preparing anti-armour weapons on armoured vehicles.



MICHAEL CHONG

The Official Opposition questioned the Liberals as to why Canadians first learned from Twitter about the front line role that our troops are playing, and not from the government. The Liberals had little to say, choosing neither to confirm nor deny the veracity of the photo and the role of Canadian troops. During a recent media briefing, the Minister of National Defence also declined the opportunity to update Canadians on the mission or shed light on Canada's role in the operation, saying the government will inform Canadians when the time is right.

In stark contrast to their calls for openness and transparency, the Liberals seem to have abandoned the previous government's practice. As Official Opposition, we believe that Canadians, Parliament, and members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families deserve to be informed of the combat mission involving the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

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