

NATIONAL NEWS

■ **MILITARY:** National Defence says it will update its website, but won't hold public briefings about combat mission in Iraq and Syria until after Canadian election campaign ends in October

DND in silent mode for fed election

MURRAY BREWSTER
Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Expect to hear a lot about the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant during the federal election, just not from the Canadian military.

National Defence has slipped into silent mode for the duration of the campaign and says it will update its website, but won't hold public briefings about the combat mission in Iraq and Syria, barring something extraordinary.

Canadian warplanes have conducted 29 air strikes against Islamic State positions and units, including one in Syria, since the last update on July 9.

The latest figures were compiled by The Canadian Press using a list on the department's website.

The lone mission in Syria took place on July 30 in the town of Al Bukamal, across the border with Iraq, and aimed at a compound where Islamic State fighters gather.

Since the expansion of the Canadian bombing campaign last spring, CF-18 jets have conducted fewer than a dozen missions against ISIL on Syrian territory, even though it was a prominent argument last spring for the Harper government's continuation of the combat mission.

U.S.-led coalition allies, on the other hand, have conducted up to four strikes a day on the territory Washington says has been ceded to Islamic extremists by Syrian dictator Bashar Assad's regime. The Canadian bombing runs have been mostly concentrated in northern Iraq, supporting operations by Kurdish peshmerga fighters in the vicinity of Mosul, Sinjar and Tal Afar.

Interestingly, the pace of Canadian bombing appears to have



POSTMEDIA NETWORK FILES

A Canadian Armed Forces CF-18 Fighter jet arrives at the Canadian Air Task Force Flight Operations Area in Kuwait where the jets are part of Canada's contribution to coalition assistance to security forces in Iraq who are fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

slowed since the election was called Aug. 2 with only five strikes carried out.

National Defence would only say the U.S. coalition headquarters hands out the orders.

It's unclear whether the government has placed any limits on sorties. What is clear is that the mute button has been hit on wide-ranging communication with the public.

"All (public affairs) products and activities are to be curtailed

during the election period," says an internal department directive. "All DND and (Armed Forces) public affairs staff and commanders are requested to follow a 'no surprises' approach in order to ensure that all departmental communications are respectful of our democratic values and obligations."

Taking a step back during an election campaign is standard for departments including National Defence, but doing so while com-

bat operations are underway presents a series of accountability challenges.

It limits what the public sees and hears to the often-overheated rhetoric of politicians on both sides of the aisles.

Steve Saideman, an international affairs professor at Carleton

University, said he believes Canadian society is mature enough to be able to get detailed updates on the war without them becoming a do-or-die election issue.

What's happening is political message control, he said.

"If there are Canadians in harm's way, I do believe there

should be information flowing to Canada about this ongoing mission," said Saideman, who added that Canadian elections rarely turn on foreign policy.

The Islamic State war is unique in that it differs from both 2008 and 2011 elections when Canadian combat troops were fighting in Afghanistan and warplanes attacked targets in Libya.

Canadian media were embedded in Kandahar and able to independently report on the military and airfields for the Libya campaign were accessible.

Today, media are banned from Kuwaiti bases where the strike missions originate and special forces troops in northern Iraq bar journalists from reporting on them.

Retired colonel George Petrolekas of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute says outside of the writ period he's in favour of more transparency, but during the campaign he agrees with the notion of only reporting significant events.

"The very act of talking about our strike successes can be perceived as political," he said.

There is also the question of what the public potentially isn't being told.

In 2008, CBC television reporter Mellissa Fung was kidnapped by criminal elements loosely associated with the Taliban, three days before the election. The public broadcaster, other Canadian media outlets, the military and the government kept the abduction under wraps for security reasons until she was released a month later.

■ POLITICS

Harper's circle lands in spotlight

JENNIFER DITCHBURN
Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Conservative Leader Stephen Harper now says the "vast majority" of his staff didn't know about a plan to fake Mike Duffy's personal repayment of Senate expenses, changing his position that only a single person was aware.

The focus on Harper's office and who was involved in negotiating the repayment scheme, is expected to intensify as more witnesses testify in Duffy's fraud, breach of trust and bribery trial.

In early June 2013, weeks after it was revealed that Harper's then-chief of staff Nigel Wright repaid the \$90,000, Harper emphasized to the House of Commons that it was Wright's doing.

"Those were his decisions," Harper said. "They were not communicated to me or to members of my office."

Then-cabinet minister James Moore told the Commons that Wright "acted alone."

But Justice Charles Vaillancourt has heard testimony from Wright and seen hundreds of emails, that place a half dozen staff and party brass in the know.

One of those told about Wright's plan to repay was Ray Novak, Harper's current chief of staff and a senior campaign director. Novak is arguably the closest person in the party or the government to Harper. He's not just a staff member, but also a friend and confidante.

On Thursday, Harper backed Novak's claim that he did not read the direct email from Wright — then his boss — and didn't know about Wright's payment.

"We were all told, we were all told that Mr. Duffy had repaid his expenses ... that's not only what the entire caucus thought and I thought, that is what the vast majority of our staff also believed was the case," Harper told reporters in Hay River, NWT. The trial is likely to become even more sticky for the Conservative campaign, as two key lawyers are expected to testify on the negotiations inside Harper's office around repayment of the senator's expenses. Janice Payne, Duffy's lawyer in 2013, and Benjamin Perrin, then a PMO lawyer, are expected to be defence and Crown witnesses respectively. Both took part in a March 22,



POSTMEDIA NETWORK FILES

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2013 conference call with Novak and Wright. Conservative spokesman Kory Teneycke said Novak was on the first part of the call, but didn't hear discussion of Wright's cheque.

Teneycke could not comment on what Novak did hear during the call — a blank that defence attorney Donald Bayne is likely to try to fill if and when Payne and Perrin testify.

A day after the conference call, Wright wrote to Novak and Perrin directly: "I think her approach works. I will send my cheque on Monday."

Three days later, Wright sent the cheque to Payne's office.

Novak and others weren't just told about Wright's decision to repay the \$90,000, they were also told about a plan a month earlier to have the party pay for both Payne's legal bills and Duffy's expenses.

In an email Wright sent to Novak on Feb. 22, Wright directs Novak to read a chain of emails on negotiations with Payne, calling it the "state of play."

"We are ready to move when we hear back from his lawyer," Wright tells Novak.

One element of that "state of play," copied to Novak,

contains Wright's comment that "the party is open to keeping Sen. Duffy whole since it is clear that any overpayments were innocently received. I have a call into the party to confirm this, as I think that the senator has a right to have it confirmed."

Duffy's lawyer pointedly raised Novak's name during the proceedings on Friday. He has referred to Novak as a "conduit" to Harper.

"He's not there for plausible deniability...he's not there for that?" Bayne asked.

Wright responded: "Ray ... was the No. 2 person, senior member in the PMO and he's entitled to know what's going on."

Stephen Lecce, another member of Harper's current campaign team, was also copied on those points of negotiation. Later, Lecce helped draft the media lines that Duffy would use when telling the public it was he (not the party or Wright) who would repay his expenses.

Lecce did not respond to a request for comment. Another figure who appears in the email exchanges is party lawyer Arthur Hamilton, who Payne emails in March 2013 to inquire about "when we can expect to be in funds." The Conservative financial fund chief Sen. Irving Gerstein was consulted by Wright on having the party pay for Duffy's expenses when they were first estimated at \$32,000.

"These are the actions of Mr. Duffy and Mr. Wright. You hold people responsible for their own actions, you certainly don't hold subordinates responsible for the actions of their superiors," Harper told reporters Friday.



**Tous les lundis et mercredis, 19h
Every Monday and Wednesday 7pm
Bingo Bilingue / Bilingual Bingo**



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ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS OF UNION GAS LIMITED

Union Gas Limited has applied for approval to change its gas commodity, storage and transportation rates effective January 1, 2016.

Learn more. Have your say.

Union Gas Limited has applied to change its rates to better reflect how it supplies natural gas to its customers. The proposed changes include the following:

- A change in the reference price used to set rates on a quarterly basis for a majority of its customers; and
- A change to how it allocates costs to the different types of customers that it serves.

An average residential customer would see the following annual bill impact, but these impacts would only start in 2018:

Residential Customer – Service Area	Approximate Bill Impact
Southern Ontario (Windsor to Hamilton)	Decrease of \$20
Northern Delivery Area (North Bay to Kapuskasing)	Increase of \$26
All Other Delivery Areas	Decrease of \$1.50 – \$51.50

Other customers in Union Gas Limited's service area, including businesses, will also be affected.

THE ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD IS HOLDING A PUBLIC HEARING

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) will hold a public hearing to consider the application filed by Union Gas.

We will question Union Gas on the case. We will also hear arguments from individuals and from groups that represent the customers of Union Gas. At the end of this hearing, the OEB will decide whether to approve the changes that Union Gas has requested in this application.

The OEB is an independent and impartial public agency. We make decisions that serve the public interest. Our goal is to promote a financially viable and efficient energy sector that provides you with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

BE INFORMED AND HAVE YOUR SAY

You have the right to information regarding this application and to be involved in the process.

- You can review the application filed by Union Gas on the OEB's website now.
- You can file a letter with your comments, which will be considered during the hearing.
- You can become an active participant (called an intervenor). Apply by **August 25, 2015** or the hearing will go ahead without you and you will not receive any further notice of the proceeding.
- At the end of the process, you can review the OEB's decision and its reasons on our website.

LEARN MORE

Our file number for this case is **EB-2015-0181**. To learn more about this hearing, find instructions on how to file letters or become an intervenor, or to access any document related to this case, please select the file number **EB-2015-0181** from the list on the OEB website: www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/notice. You can also phone our Consumer Relations Centre at 1-877-632-2727 with any questions.

ORAL VS. WRITTEN HEARINGS

There are two types of OEB hearings – oral and written. The OEB will determine at a later date whether to proceed by way of a written or oral hearing. If you think an oral hearing is needed, you can write to the OEB to explain why by **August 25, 2015**.

PRIVACY

If you write a letter of comment, your name and the content of your letter will be put on the public record and the OEB website. However, your personal telephone number, home address and e-mail address will be removed. If you are a business, all your information will remain public. If you apply to become an intervenor, all information will be public.

This hearing will be held under section 36 of the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, S.O. 1998 c.15 (Schedule B).

