

COLD TERROR

HOW CANADA NURTURES AND EXPORTS
TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

STEWART BELL



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FOREWORD BY DR. ROHAN GUNARATNA

The Context

The most noteworthy aspect of Al Qaeda in the post-9/11 environment has been its broadened appeal among the Muslim community. Al Qaeda's ideology and operational methodology of suicide (martyrdom) has become popular, widespread and accepted by like-minded jihad groups from Australia to the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. After inventing itself as a popular movement, the network has maintained its course despite sustained pressure by the United States and its allies. Its resilience, intransigence and failure to yield have surprised many, and its followers, both cradle and convert Muslims, have become even more committed in its jihad campaign (holy war). Al Qaeda has become more resolute in achieving its strategic goals.

In the face of adversity, the global jihad movement has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to generate a post-9/11 vision of perpetual war against the West. The periodic arrests in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Continental Europe and Australia demonstrate the adaptive nature of the constantly evolving network. It no longer needs to send operatives from Afghanistan; there are young first- and second-generation politicized and radicalized Muslims living in the West willing to carry out its avowed mission. Even if Al Qaeda leadership is hunted down and the group destroyed, its mission of attacking the West articulated by bin Laden as a religious duty and popularized by Al Qaeda will continue.

Threat Context

As a migrant-receiving nation, Canada today faces a significant terrorist threat. First, the periodic influx of migrants—especially migrants from conflict zones—means that newcomers are vulnerable to terrorist indoctrination and recruitment. Second, the operation of the well-entrenched and established support networks on Canadian soil will seek to politicize and radicalize them. Third, Canada has emerged as an important gateway to the United States, the primary target of multiple jihad groups.

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The vast majority of Canadian migrants and diaspora are peace-loving citizens who respect Canadian laws and norms. Nonetheless, there is a tiny minority driven by events in their homeland as well as by global events that seek to support and participate in violence both in their homelands and even in their host country—Canada. As the recent arrests in Canada demonstrates, the threat facing the country is recurrent and enduring. To aid in understanding the context and the evolving nature of the threat to Canada, there is no book as exhaustive as *Cold Terror*—a book authored by Stewart Bell in the shadow of 9/11, a strategic event that transformed the world.

Three significant developments mark the post-9/11 threat environment:

- The dismantling of a state-of-the-art terrorist and guerrilla training and operational infrastructure in Afghanistan.
- The dispersal of Al Qaeda and formation of a multi-headed global jihad movement that is resilient and difficult to combat.
- The emergence of Afghanistan and Iraq as two frontiers of jihad, with a profound effect on Canadian Muslims.

As Mr. Bell's book illustrates, Canada has featured prominently in each one of these stages. At least a dozen Canadians received training in Afghanistan. Many Canadians participated in Jihad campaigns from Chechnya to Kashmir and Iraq. A few hundred Canadians are angry about the suffering of Muslims in Iraq, and some of them want to seek justice and others revenge by attacking targets at home and overseas.

Identifying the Threat

Managing migrant and diaspora communities in an age of globalization is a challenge. It is especially a challenge for a country that is committed to preserving the ethnic and religious character of its migrants and diasporas. In fact, Canada prides itself in the way it treats its visitors and immigrants. However, Canada must take into consideration the realities of the post-9/11 environment. Mr. Bell's book contributes considerably toward both identifying and explaining the threat to a point that no other author has been able

to accomplish before. His book highlights two key problems that Canada must address.

First, there must be nation-wide recognition that the current Canadian political and administrative structure and system is susceptible and vulnerable to misuse and abuse by terrorist and extremist groups. As Canadians are trusting and want to be politically correct, terrorist and extremist groups have been able to mobilize support within their communities. These terrorist and extremist groups have been able to accomplish this feat by infiltrating Canadian host institutions such as the Canadian political parties, including mainstream political parties. Canada must develop tough legislation that will preclude politicians and officials from becoming subjected to constituency and electoral pressure.

Second, terrorist and extremist groups have successfully penetrated the migrant and diaspora community institutions. Operating through front, cover and sympathetic organizations, terrorist and extremist groups have built networks for propaganda, recruitment, procurement and other support activities. Canada must not fear to legislate against groups and individuals that seek to support or conduct terrorist attacks regardless of whether it is in Canada or overseas. By lobbying through human rights and other civil society organizations, terrorist groups have been able to block and delay Canada from passing appropriate legislation. In protecting Canada's national security, its law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies are as good as the powers given to them.

The Way Ahead

As illustrated by Stewart Bell, the threat facing Canada is evolving. The Canadian response must be proactive and dynamic. In developing its counter-terrorism structures and procedures, Canada must not be too far behind other western migrant- and diaspora-hosting countries. As the threat groups learn from each other, so should the Canadian security and intelligence and law enforcement authorities seek to keep up with the knowledge and technology developed by other countries to fight terrorism and extremism.

As Mr. Bell explains, no country, including Canada, is immune from the threat of terrorism or extremism. Canada, which has an image for working closely with Asian and Middle Eastern countries,

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must draw from global best practices in countering politically motivated violence. To better understand the changing environment, Canada should play a key role in building bridges between the West and countries that need assistance to fight terrorism. On the ground, Canada should encourage governments to move from cooperation to collaboration—building common databases, participating in the exchange of personnel and in joint training and operations, transferring resources and expertise, and sharing experience. In the face of emerging and current threats, the Canadian authorities must constantly assess the strengths and the weaknesses of Canada's security architecture and seek to close its gaps and loopholes. As there is no standard textbook for fighting the contemporary wave of terrorism, governments must maximize the successes and minimize the failures.

In fighting the contemporary wave of violence, Mr. Bell's research shows that intelligence-led law enforcement operations have proved to be the most effective. However, such operations need to be coordinated with parallel political and diplomatic activity. As media shapes public opinion, and public opinion is critical for fighting terrorism and extremism, media must be brought in as a partner. As public support is pivotal, it is so critical for the government, political parties and the intellectual elite to engage the communities, especially the communities vulnerable to terrorist and extremist penetration. In the early 21st century, the fight against terrorism and extremism has transformed into a multi-dimensional fight requiring multi-pronged, multi-agency, multinational and multi-jurisdictional efforts.

As Canada's most respected writer on terrorism and conflict, Mr. Bell promises much for the future. We are all indebted to him for his contribution to counter-terrorism research and more importantly, increasing the public awareness and understanding of the contemporary threat.

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INTRODUCTION

HOW DO YOU TELL A MOTHER her son may be a terrorist? Asha Muhayadin is a mother of five who works on the packaging line at a Toronto bakery, and a Muslim refugee from Somali. I met her when I was researching the case of her son, Yasin, who was arrested in August 2005. He and his friend Ali Dirie had taken a rented Buick down to Ohio and loaded up on illegal firearms and ammo. As they were crossing the border back into Canada at Fort Erie, they were pulled over and searched. Customs agents found a loaded Hi-Point semi-automatic strapped to Yasin's groin. Ali had two semis hidden in his pants. They pleaded guilty and were sent away to serve federal time in Kingston.

Something about the case had not seemed right from the start. Toronto was flooded with illegal guns in the summer of 2005, but Yasin and Ali were not gangsters; they were devout young Muslims who had worshipped at the Salaheddin Islamic Centre, a mosque in the immigrant-rich city of Scarborough, Ontario that had repeatedly surfaced in counter-terrorism investigations. Why were they bringing guns into Canada? "That's the million dollar question," Ali's brother Jafar had told me when I met him at a Tim Hortons coffee shop one afternoon.

On June 3, 2006, at a news conference near Toronto's international airport, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) claimed to have solved the mystery. In an operation that had started the day before and continued through the night, police tactical teams had rounded up a group of mostly young Muslim men accused of training at a rural property north of the city and assembling truck bombs that were to be detonated by remote control at the Toronto regional

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headquarters of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Toronto Stock Exchange.

A sample of the evidence seized during the raids was laid out on a table for the benefit of the TV cameras—a bag of ammonium nitrate, a cell phone-triggered detonator, a handgun, a computer hard drive, a door that had been used for target practice, and camouflage fatigues. A senior CSIS official said the group had been inspired by the ideology of Al Qaeda. A dozen adults and five juveniles were charged altogether. Their names were listed on a news release. Yasin and Ali were on the list. The charge sheet accused them of smuggling firearms for terrorist purposes.

As soon as the press conference was over, I got in my car and drove to Asha's place. What I was going to say to her, I was not sure. I started writing about terrorism and extremism in the late 1980s, shortly after Sikh militants in Vancouver, where I grew up, placed suitcase bombs on two Air India planes, knocking one out of the sky, killing 329 people. Since then I had been shot at by the Taliban; detained by Pakistani military intelligence for getting too close to an abandoned guerrilla training camp; and warned by Canadian police that the Tamil Tigers were looking for me. I had forced a politician to resign by exposing his connections to neo-Nazis; walked on a blood-soaked carpet after a Hamas suicide bombing; chased a terrorist fundraiser through a Toronto parking lot; and confronted one of Canada's most notorious terrorist ring-leaders at the front door of his Montreal townhouse.

I was the first journalist to tour Canada's top secret signals intelligence headquarters, the Communications Security Establishment; I triggered a police investigation by reporting on a leaked intelligence report; and I mined the Access to Information Act and other sources to compile what may be the largest collection of documents on Canadian terrorists in private hands. I had met with accused terrorists, their victims, and the men and women charged with keeping their countries secure from terror, and given lectures on my reporting to community groups, the RCMP, CSIS and the Canadian military. But I had never had to tell a mother that her son had just been charged with terrorism.

Asha covered her head with a green scarf and let me in. As I took off my shoes, I saw that she was with her best friend and her

son Abdul. The apartment was small and sparse. There was a tiny kitchen, a TV stand and a wooden cradle that held a copy of the *Koran*. On top of her factory job, Asha has her own home business, Asha Clothing. It's the only way she can scrape by. I started talking. I told her about the RCMP news conference, and I showed her the press release that named Yasin and Ali. At first, she got mad. She raged for half an hour about how all Muslims are called terrorists these days and how her son's life was over, not to mention her own. "He's not a terrorist," she said. "This is not fair." But then she turned to her friend and sobbed loudly into her shoulder. Abdul asked me if he could make a formal statement for the newspaper. He said that his brother was "a pure-hearted guy" and could never do something like that, and that terrorism goes against Islam. "Our religion forbids it, it is totally forbidden to kill civilians. If you kill an innocent person, they're supposed to kill you. That's shariah." An hour later, I left them, apologizing my way out the dented metal apartment door. I felt like I had thrown a hand grenade into the room.

The arrests of the Toronto 17, as they are known, were a sharp shock for Canada. Many Canadians have long lived under the impression that they are insulated from terrorism because of domestic altruism and foreign policies they judge less aggressive than those of their southern neighbor. Canadian troops are not fighting in Iraq; they are peacekeepers in blue berets who bring kindness to troubled lands, or so the theory goes. Why would anyone want to attack Canada? Just five days before the arrests, the Deputy Director Operations of CSIS, Jack Hooper, had testified before the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. He explained that Canada had a problem with terrorists in general, and homegrown terrorists in particular. His testimony was met with incredulity by Members of Parliament, while the media speculated he was exaggerating to try to coax more money out of the government. The reaction reflected the way terrorism was generally seen in Canada, as someone else's problem, not Canada's concern.

In reality, whether its citizens realized it or not, Canada long ago became a source of international terrorism and an operational base for world terror—a country where the planet's deadliest

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religious, ethnic and political extremist movements had set up shop. According to the latest annual report of CSIS, released in 2006, “A relatively large number of terrorist groups are known to be operating in Canada, engaged in fundraising, procuring materials, spreading propaganda, recruiting followers and conducting other activities.” The arrests of June 2006 were simply the latest variant of a problem that had been festering for two-plus decades.

Armenian terrorists were the first to realize Canada’s potential as an offshore base in the early 1980s. In 1985, Air India Flight 182 was blown out of the sky by a bomb planted by Sikh extremists from British Columbia. Then came the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, as the promise of a more peaceful post-Cold War world order was shattered by the rise of ethnic nationalism and religious extremism. Next came the Middle Eastern groups, the Palestinian factions and the Lebanese Hezbollah. U.S. intelligence authorities awoke to Canada’s role in world terrorism in 1997, when Gazi Ibrahim Abu Mezer crossed into the United States from Canada to blow up the Atlantic Avenue subway in Brooklyn. When police and members of the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force raided his New York apartment on July 31, 1997, the morning of the planned attack, Abu Mezer and a Palestinian colleague, Lafi Khalil, detonated their explosive suicide vests and were shot. Bombs were found in the apartment.

By 1998, every major terrorist group in the world was operating in Canada. Ward Elcock, who was CSIS Director at the time, testified that, “With perhaps the singular exception of the United States, there are more international terrorist groups active here than any other country in the world.” The Canadian Senate subcommittee on security and intelligence wrote in its 1999 report that Canada had become a “venue of opportunity” for terrorists. “Most of the major international terrorist organizations have a presence in Canada.”

On December 14, 1999, Ahmed Ressam of Montreal, who had trained at Osama bin Laden’s camps in Afghanistan, built a massive bomb in Vancouver and tried to cross the border to blow up Los Angeles International Airport. The Ressam case is considered by intelligence analysts to be a pivotal moment for Canada. A “Secret” CSIS report describes it as “a watershed event in the evolution of the Sunni Islamic threat in Canada, changing the perception of Canada from terrorist safe haven to

active operational environment.” One of the recruiters who convinced several of the 9/11 hijackers to voyage to Afghanistan for training had been the imam of a Montreal mosque.

Standing before a room full of reporters in Washington, D.C. almost three years after September 11, 2001, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Robert Mueller announced that intelligence sources had detected that Al Qaeda was again trying to strike inside America. Terrorists intended, Ashcroft said, to “hit the United States hard.” Since 9/11, Osama bin Laden had certainly made no secret of his desire to do so, and the bombings two months earlier in Madrid had underscored that Al Qaeda was still capable of organizing mass casualty attacks within Western countries.

Mueller went on to say that the FBI was looking for seven Al Qaeda members in connection with plots to attack the U.S. There was the American Muslim convert Adam Gadahn; Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani woman; two others, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, who had played roles in the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; and Adnan Shukrijumah, who had been part of a plot to detonate a dirty bomb in the United States. But it was the remaining pair that was of particular interest.

Abderraouf Jdey had trained with the 9/11 hijackers and recorded a “martyrdom video,” which was found at an Al Qaeda base in Afghanistan. The other, Amer El-Maati, was a licensed pilot who wanted to hijack a plane and crash it into a U.S. building, according to the FBI. Both were suspected members of Al Qaeda; both had professed their desire to kill for their cause; both were considered “a clear and present danger to America;” and both were on the loose.

Both were also Canadians.

To some this sounded like a verse of “Blame Canada,” but the press conference highlighted a cold truth: Canada had a terrorism problem. In the weeks preceding the Washington press conference, for example, a Canadian was arrested in Ottawa on charges that he was part of a plot to build an ammonium nitrate bomb to be detonated in the United Kingdom; a young Canadian from Windsor, Ontario was arrested in Gaza after he was recruited and trained by Hamas to kill Jews in North America; and Abdurahman

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Khadr of Toronto went on national television to confess that his was an “Al Qaeda family.” A year earlier, another Canadian, Abdullah Warsame, had been arrested in Minneapolis. An immigrant from Somalia who moved to Toronto in 1989, Warsame had attended two terrorist boot camps in Afghanistan, where he had met bin Laden, whom he found “inspirational,” an FBI affidavit says. Although he wanted to move permanently to Afghanistan, Al Qaeda apparently considered him more useful in Canada and had paid for him to return to Toronto in April 2001.

The FBI was becoming so concerned about Canada that it distributed a classified bulletin warning: “We believe Al Qaeda continues to have a terrorist infrastructure in Canada, one with documented links to the U.S. While many border security measures have been implemented since 9/11, the vast expanse of the 4,000-mile-long U.S. northern border, with eighty-six official points of entry and various unofficial crossings, may still provide opportunities for operatives to penetrate U.S. national security, particularly if Western passports are used.”

Canada is not the only country with a terrorism problem. But it has unique troubles because of the nature of its society, its immigration system, its proximity to the United States and because, compared to its allies, it has historically done so little to fight terror. By failing to take appropriate action early on, Canadian political leaders opened the door for the world’s major security threat, Al Qaeda. Since its inception, Al Qaeda has had an active presence in Canada. “Al Qaeda has operatives and intelligence gatherers in Canada,” says an internal CSIS report written in the days after the September 11 attacks. The report names several Al Qaeda agents, including a Toronto convenience-store clerk and a teacher at a Toronto Muslim school.

At least two major Al Qaeda networks have operated in Canada, the Montreal-based Groupe Fateh Kamel and the Ahmed Khadr group, based in Toronto, in addition to several smaller ones such as the Kassem Daher Network. “Al Qaeda’s global links, including to residents in Canada, and its use of sleeper agents—small groups of covert operators sent to infiltrate countries until called upon to attack—make its activities unpredictable and a threat to the security of Canada,” the report says.

What are terrorists doing in Canada? The short answer is: everything. In the 1970s and 1980s, terrorist groups could rely on the Soviet Union, Libya and other sympathetic countries for funding, weapons and a base of operations. This state sponsorship of terror was a way for nations to engage their enemies by proxy without getting their own hands dirty. Since the end of the Cold War, however, state sponsorship has declined and terrorist groups have been forced to become more self-reliant. Cut off from the benevolence of their state backers, terrorists have had to establish their own international support networks to raise money, purchase material and spread the gospel of militancy. Functioning like global corporations, these terror support networks have offices throughout the world, run by terrorist-bureaucrats, those engaged in the mundane but nonetheless crucial activities that feed the international organization with money, passports, information and legitimacy. A French prosecutor who convicted members of the Montreal Algerian cell observed: “You can hijack a plane with a [box] cutter, but you need false documents to get on the plane.”

Canada is the land of opportunity for terrorist groups seeking money to finance their bloody campaigns. Jobs are plentiful; welfare is generous. Everyone who sets foot in Canada is entitled to all the rights of a Canadian citizen. It is easy enough to set up a charity dedicated to a worthy humanitarian cause and launder the money instead to terrorist causes. In fact, until December 2001, it was perfectly legal to collect money in Canada for terrorist groups. Canada’s Anti-terrorism Act now forbids the practice, but enforcing the law has proved difficult, in part because it is not retroactive, meaning it cannot be used to prosecute terrorists for crimes committed before its enactment. FINTRAC, the federal government agency that monitors suspicious banking transactions, said in its 2005 annual report to Parliament that \$180-million had flowed to terrorist groups from Canada in the previous 12 months.

The other type of fundraising is the criminal kind. Police and corporate investigators looking into organized crime used to follow the money trail to mobsters or bikers. Now they are finding that those behind organized crime are terrorist groups such as the Tamil Tigers. Terrorist groups in Canada are involved in bank fraud, migrant smuggling, credit and debit card fraud, mortgage

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fraud, extortion, theft and money laundering. The RCMP calls it “criminal extremism”—crime for the sake of supporting terror.

Terrorists have long used Canada as a hiding place, both before and after attacks, as a recruiting ground and as a propaganda base. Terror is a weapon that seeks to psychologically hammer its opponents into submission, and it therefore requires lobbyists, front organizations and Internet sites to spread the terrorists’ message. Canada hosts all three. Terror propagandists also organize pressure campaigns against those who threaten the cause. I have had my own experiences with this tool of terror. After writing an article about Islamic terrorists recruiting on a Canadian Internet site, I received more than three thousand e-mails in a single day, some of them containing overt threats. “Please don’t write like this or I will fuck your mother, father, brothers and all you know,” said one. Another said: “I kill you if I find you.”

Canada’s terrorism problem is responsible for untold carnage. It generates severe problems within Canada, especially in refugee communities, where extremists have seized control of community institutions. Refugees who come to Canada to start a new life should not have to live under the thumb of the same radicals that forced them to leave their homelands in the first place, but that is exactly what has happened. If Canada is going to admit refugees from war zones, it should be doing more to protect them after they get here so they can make the transition to becoming full Canadians rather than being forced to keep fighting the wars they thought they had left back home in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India or the Middle East.

Canadian-based terror also creates risks for Canada’s allies and Canadians traveling abroad. Canadian terrorists have spilled blood around the world. They are known to have taken part in the 1993 World Trade Center truck bombing in New York, as well as suicide bombings in Israel and bombings by the Provisional Irish Republican Army; political killings in India and the murder of tourists in Egypt; a 1996 truck bombing in the heart of Colombo, Sri Lanka, that killed close to one hundred civilians; the 1995 bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, which killed seventeen; and the Bali bombing of October 2002, which killed more than two hundred innocent people. A Canadian was part of the

group blamed for the 2003 bombing of Western housing complexes in Riyadh. In 1985, Canadians were behind one of the deadliest terror attacks in history, the Air India tragedy.

In an era of globalized travel and business, when people venture far from home for work, pleasure and public duty, governments must think about the safety of their citizens abroad. Another danger is that, when they travel, Canadians will be looked upon with suspicion by governments that have lost faith in Canada's ability to rein in terrorists. Maher Arar, the Syrian Canadian who spent a year in a Damascus jail after being deported by American authorities, may well have been a victim of this.

Canada's approach to counterterrorism has undermined not only its security but also its Canadian foreign policy and stature among nations. Although it aims to be a force of peace in the world, in some countries Canada is not seen that way at all. In Sri Lanka, Canada is the country that for years allowed the Tamil Tigers, the world's leading practitioners of suicide bombings, to operate freely and raise money that bankrolled terrorism and a brutal civil war. The same was true in India, which suffered through years of Sikh terrorist violence originating in Canada. Israel has had to deal with Canadian terrorists, and so have France, Italy, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Egypt and Pakistan, not to mention Canada's closest partner, the United States.

"To many Americans," says a report published by the Washington, DC-based Center for Immigration Studies, "the longest undefended border in the world now looks like a 4,000-mile-long portal for terrorists." Canada risks being isolated and perhaps even punished if it does not do its part against terrorism. And if Canada does not take care of the terrorists on its own soil, someone else will, and better that CSIS and the RCMP should tackle Canadian terrorists than Mossad or the CIA.

As the arrests in Toronto should remind Canadians, Canada is itself a terror target. Intelligence reports indicate that financial buildings, government offices, shopping malls, tourist attractions and mass transit across the country have been covertly videotaped, possibly by terrorists looking for targets. "Current intelligence suggests that economic and symbolic targets such as Parliament Hill, nuclear power

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plants and the Toronto transit system may have been subject to reconnaissance by extremists," says a Canadian government intelligence assessment dated April 2006. "There are individuals and groups in Canada who are involved in fundraising, money laundering, communications and planning acts of violence in Canada and abroad."

In April 2003, Pakistani authorities arrested two senior al-Qaeda operatives near Peshawar. In the "pocket litter" of one of the men, police found a list of Toronto landmarks, including Union Station and the Eaton Centre. One of the men was linked to a 9/11 planner, and the other had ties to Ramzi Yousef, who bombed the World Trade Center in New York in 1993. In the face of such threats, Canada has put itself at greater risk by tolerating terrorist support networks. Terrorists who feel comfortable enough to raise money and forge passports in Canada will not hesitate to stage attacks here as well; almost every terror group since the Armenians has done so, resulting in assassination attempts against several visiting dignitaries and Ottawa-based diplomats. It should come as no surprise that Al Qaeda has plotted attacks against Montreal Jews and the U.S. embassy in Ottawa. In the eyes of Al Qaeda, Canada is the enemy, as bin Laden has confirmed in one of his tape-recorded messages. "For Sunni Islamic extremists," says a classified CSIS report, "Canada is no longer regarded as simply a safe haven for criminal and logistical support activities. Canada is a viable terrorist target."

Canada values its law and order. Its symbol around the world is the Mountie in scarlet. So how did the country become a troublesome hub of world terror? To some extent Canada is naturally prone to terrorist infiltration. It is largely a country of immigrants. People settle in Canada from all over the world, and some bring with them the hatreds and causes of their homelands. Canada also has large ethnic communities, where terrorists can hide out, raise money and recruit. And Canada is right next door to the United States, the Great Satan in the eyes of many terrorists. "There are a variety of factors which explain why Canada is vulnerable," according to former CSIS Director Elcock. "Our borders and coastlines are long. Our society, like all developed countries, is comparatively wealthy—a source of technology, of equipment and funds. As with other democracies,

our openness and respect for rights and freedoms limit the ability of the state to suppress terrorism in a ruthless, repressive fashion.”

But there is more to it than that. Federal policies and the government’s longstanding reluctance to confront the challenges of terrorism are also important factors. A U.S. Library of Congress study said terrorists were increasingly using Canada as an operational base because of its “generous welfare system, lax immigration laws, infrequent prosecutions, light sentencing, and long borders and coastlines ... These factors combine to make Canada a favored destination for terrorists and international organized crime groups.”

Perhaps as important as Canadian policy is Canadian complacency. For many years, few Canadians seemed to realize the extent to which their country was being exploited by terrorists. In a poll conducted early in 2006, only 4 percent of Canadians ranked the war on terror as the most pressing foreign policy issue facing the government, and surveys have also showed wavering and sometimes soft support for the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan. Canadians generally do not recognize they are at war against terror. Instead of standing up to its foes, as Canadians did in the wars of the twentieth century, we have wrung our hands about counterterrorism measures; we worried that they might be infringing too heavily on our human rights and civil liberties; we worried that maybe they weren’t even necessary. The Senate security subcommittee’s 1999 report concluded that when it comes to terrorism, “considerable complacency (‘it can’t happen here’) persists among the public-at-large.”

This complacency was long fed by complacent politicians. In its handling of each of the major terrorist groups that operate in Canada—the Sikh extremists, Tamil Tigers, Hezbollah and Al Qaeda—the government has missed important opportunities to shut them down and has displayed an astounding level of indifference to nations afflicted by terrorism. The Canadian branch of the Babbar Khalsa, a Sikh terrorist group, was allowed to register as a charity, allowing mass killers to give tax receipts for blood money. The Liberal Cabinet refused on three occasions to add the Tamil Tigers to its list of designated terrorist groups, even though it is one

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of the top targets of Canadian counterterrorism investigators. It took a change of government in 2006 to finally get the Tigers black-listed. Bill Graham, when he was the minister of foreign affairs, also resisted outlawing Hezbollah because he said it was a collective of “teachers, doctors and farmers.” Ahmed Khadr, a close associate of bin Laden, was financed by the Canadian International Development Agency, and when he was arrested in Pakistan, Canada’s prime minister intervened and he was released.

The lackluster response of Canadian politicians can be partly understood in the language of partisan politics. Some Members of Parliament hold stridently anti-American views, or at least recognize the political benefits of publicly denouncing the United States, and this sometimes finds expression on matters related to terrorism and counterterrorism. In addition, organized opposition to counterterrorism comes mainly from immigrant, refugee and ethnic lobby groups, which complain that their members are unfairly targeted by security measures. The Liberals have generally been reluctant to do anything that might anger the voters represented by these lobbyists. And so whenever counterterrorism was raised in Parliament in the months before 9/11, the Liberals responded by accusing the Opposition of racism and even anti-Canadianism.

In the logic of political strategy, to take a stand against terrorism was to risk losing the support of interest groups that buy influence by promising to deliver ethnic voting blocks. Securing the support of such lobby groups was apparently more important to these Parliamentarians than the security of Canadians. The president of the Montreal chapter of the World Tamil Movement, ruled by the federal court in 1997 to be a Tamil Tigers front organization, told me how he had helped a Liberal party candidate during the 2000 federal election campaign. “She came to our event, she was shocked, so I told her, ‘Madam, my one word will give all the votes for you.’ I told her and it was done; all the Sri Lankan votes went to the Liberals here in Montreal.”

If many Canadians have no realistic understanding of the threat posed by modern terrorism it is partly because their government has historically displayed little interest in having a full and frank debate on the topic. The leading political parties hardly mentioned national security during the federal elections of June

2004, which saw the Liberals returned to power, and January 2006, which saw them replaced by a Conservative minority. The government strategy has been to deny that Canada has a problem, because to admit that terrorists are operating from Canada might prompt the United States to impose additional security measures at the border, which would slow trade and hurt the economy. So the government spin has been that Canada has an image problem, but not a terrorism problem.

The suggestion that there is a Canadian link to international terrorism was long met not with resolve but with outrage by Canadian politicians and more recently its ambassadors in Washington. While Canadian officials finally admitted that Canada could be an Al Qaeda target, they would not entertain the suggestion that Canada has failed to pull its weight in the war on terror. Just as Jean Chrétien told the House of Commons there were no terrorists in Canada, his successor Paul Martin told CNN that concerns about Canada's approach to security were just "a bum rap." This state of affairs proved frustrating for Canada's security agencies, which were consistently feeding terrorism intelligence up the food chain, only to have it ignored for partisan political reasons. In May 2000, prime minister-to-be Paul Martin and his cabinet colleague Maria Minna were warned ahead of time that they were scheduled to attend a dinner hosted by a leading Tamil Tigers front group in Toronto, but they went anyway. The Privy Council Office tried to deal with this problem in May 2000 when it wrote a memo to the prime minister concerning "contact of ministers with groups or individuals who may have undesirable connections." It mentioned that cabinet ministers are constantly being invited to functions, some of which "have undesirable links with terrorism." The Jerusalem Fund for Human Services, World Tamil Movement, Kurdish Information Network and Babbar Khalsa were singled out for mention as "front groups operating in Canada." But the report concluded that "there is no reason for undue alarm, or for ministers to restrict their agendas."

The trouble with this kind of approach was that it was concerned only with the politics of associating with terrorists; it failed to address the underlying problem that Canadian political leaders were being skillfully manipulated and co-opted by radicals until

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eventually they gave more credence to the exaggerations and propaganda of front groups than to their own intelligence professionals. An immigration official told me how he works all day at trying to get terrorists out of the country, and then watches as politicians court these same violent organizations for votes. When he gets home, his wife sometimes asks him why he even bothers. “I honestly don’t know what to tell her,” he said. Canadian counterterrorism officials have been forced to fight two wars—one against terrorists and the other against the Canadian politicians who pretend that terrorists either do not exist or are not a threat to Canada. “If anything should be a priority, it’s the security of the nation,” a veteran Canadian intelligence chief told me. “That that should be sold for cheap political gain outrages me.”

The public was so often told there was no problem that citizens saw no need for solutions, particularly the kinds of compromises and intrusions necessary to fight terrorism effectively. Even after September 11, whenever a Canadian terrorist was arrested or deported, lobby groups turned what should have been an intelligence success into an opportunity to attack the intelligence services. When a suspected Al Qaeda sleeper agent was arrested in Montreal in May 2003, Islamic organizations portrayed it as an “inquisition against Muslims.” Likewise, when the Federal Court of Canada ruled that Mahmoud Jaballah was a member of the Egyptian Al Jihad, as CSIS said he was, that was portrayed as an example of Canada’s intolerance.

On December 10, 2002, a Pizza Pizza delivery man named Mohamed Harkat was arrested in Ottawa by an RCMP tactical team. A CSIS investigation had determined he was a member of the bin Laden network and that he had trained in Afghanistan. Harkat is an Algerian who came to Canada in 1995 and married a French Canadian named Sophie, all the while, according to CSIS, concealing his links to terrorism. He received large amounts of cash from points overseas, worked in Pakistan for a Saudi aid organization tied to bin Laden, and was a friend of Fahad Shehri, a Saudi deported for terrorism in 1997. “Prior to arriving in Canada, the Service believes that Harkat engaged in terrorism by supporting terrorist activity,” CSIS wrote. “The service furthermore believes that Harkat has engaged in those activities as a

member of a terrorist entity known as the bin Laden network, which includes Al Qaeda.” The evidence was not to be taken lightly. Zubaydah himself had identified Harkat to authorities after being captured in Pakistan.

Days after the arrest, Sophie Harkat gave reporters a photograph of her husband of two years and said she stood by him “200 per cent.” In the picture, Sophie and her mother are smiling as they embrace Mohamed. The symbolism is striking, though unintended: Canadians embracing a suspected terrorist. A support group was soon formed to lobby for Harkat’s release. An Internet site was launched, featuring photos of Harkat and letters concerning his “fight for justice.” Harkat was a victim of “racial profiling and scapegoating,” it said. “Stop the insanity,” Mrs. Harkat pleaded. She claimed that CSIS lies and breaks the law, and that she knew Harkat had done no wrong because, “In my husband’s eyes, I can read innocence.” In March 2003, Mrs. Harkat and forty others staged a demonstration in downtown Ottawa. She waved a placard reading “Save My Husband, My Friend, My Love, My Hero.”

Activists in Montreal have also set up an Internet site seeking “Justice for Adil Charkaoui,” a Moroccan whom CSIS calls an Al Qaeda sleeper agent. Although Charkaoui denies ever going to Afghanistan, both Ressam and Abu Zubaydah, who facilitated entry into bin Laden’s training camps, have said they met him there. Ressam says they trained together at the same Al Qaeda camp. “We demand the release of Adil Charkaoui,” reads the web site.

After Hassan Almrei, a forger in the Al Qaeda network, was arrested in Ontario, a Toronto woman befriended him and offered to post a \$10,000 cash bond to secure his release. “We would be happy to welcome him into our home,” said the woman. “We’re all eager to have Hassan move in with us.” The point here is not the guilt or innocence of these men. That is for the courts to determine (as of this writing they have sided in almost all respects with CSIS). What is troubling is the single-minded focus of Canadian activists, academics and politicians, on the rights of accused terrorists, without regard for the right of Canadians to defend themselves from the threat of terror. If this is how Canadians treat captured members of the bin Laden network, with hugs and protests, while the intelligence agents charged with protecting Canadians are called liars and

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cheats, no wonder terrorists view the country as a haven. “Canada,” a Russian security official once told an RCMP officer in Moscow, “is the land of the trusting fools.”

While terrorists can count on their own strident lobby, lobbying in favor of counterterrorism has been all but nonexistent. When a Tamil Tigers leader and an Iranian government hit man, who were both facing deportation, went to the Supreme Court of Canada to argue they should not be sent back to their homelands, eight lobby groups intervened in the case, all in favor of the terrorists. Nobody came forward to speak for ordinary Canadians who did not want their country to become a safe haven for terrorists. The only mainstream organizations that have consistently lobbied against terrorism were Jewish community groups, because Jews are so often the targets of terror, although several new groups have now formed, such as the Canadian Coalition Against Terror, which includes victims of Air India, 9/11, Palestinian suicide bombings and other attacks. One of the group’s first aims is to get legislation through Parliament that would make it easier for victims of terrorism to sue the financial and state backers of terrorist organizations.

Over the past two decades, the government agencies charged with national security did their best given the lack of political support for their work but they were unable to stop the parade of terrorist organizations into Canada. Security background checks are routine, but it is no easy task to investigate someone whose home is halfway around the world, especially if there is war and upheaval in the country, and if migrants are not forthright about their past or even their true identity. The regions from which new Canadians come are not the kinds of places that keep accurate records, and so Canadian authorities are unable to properly screen for terrorists. “There are no databases,” a former senior Canadian intelligence official told me. “And if there are, they are totally unreliable.” And CSIS lacks the resources to screen as thoroughly as it would like to. Jack Hooper, the agency’s Deputy Director of Operations, testified in May 2006 before the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence that 90 percent of immigrants from Pakistan and Afghanistan were not being carefully checked before being admitted to Canada. “That may be inadequate,” he said.

Canadian intelligence authorities have been disrupting terrorist groups and tipping off police when there may be grounds for criminal charges. But even when everything works as it should and terrorists are caught in Canada's security screening system, the worst fate they suffer is usually deportation. And even then, many of those ordered out of the country never leave. Under the Canadian system, they are allowed to launch appeal after appeal after appeal. Government counterterrorism agencies can spend years building a case against a terrorist, at a cost of over \$1-million per investigation. Canada's immigration system, however, is so cumbersome that few of those arrested ever get deported. The Canadian leader of the Tamil Tigers, Manickavasagam Suresh, was arrested in 1995 as a threat to national security, but in the summer of 2006 he was still here. Some terrorists have been arrested, released on bail by immigration judges, and then just disappeared. A former high-ranking Canadian security official told me, "We as a country collectively have lulled Canadians into a false sense of security by not taking seriously the cases that have come forward from the intelligence community in Canada."

The director of CSIS said as far back as 1998 that Canada was at risk of developing a reputation as a terrorist haven. "The wanton use of violence to achieve political ends is contrary to our core political and moral values," Elcock testified. "I do not believe that Canadians want their country to be known as a place from which terrorist acts elsewhere are funded or fomented. We cannot ever become known as some R&R facility for terrorists. In other words, and I will be as blunt as I can be, we cannot become, through inaction or otherwise, what might be called an unofficial state sponsor of terrorism." Following the 9/11 attacks, the government finally did the obvious—it tightened airport security, passed the Anti-terrorism Act and gave more money to security and intelligence agencies. But by then, through negligence, indifference and open support for violent organizations, Canada had already become an unofficial terrorism sponsor. Canada was in many ways a case study of what could happen when politicians let down their guard against security threats and willfully ignore warnings for partisan reasons, even as their allies and citizens are suffering the consequences.

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Former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien used to boast that the United Nations Human Development Index ranked Canada the best country in the world in which to live. During the past two decades, it has also become the best country in the world for terrorists to make their home. An official at the Department of Foreign Affairs once told me that in the past, when there was a terrorist attack somewhere in the world, the department would routinely check the names to see if there were any Canadians among the victims. “Nowadays, we check both ends,” he said. What he meant was that officials must now also run the names of the bombers to see if they were Canadians, because increasingly they are.

The government of Stephen Harper, which took office after winning a minority of seats in Parliament on January 23, 2006, was quick to send out the message that it intended to take a harder line against terrorists. It was the first government besides Israel to sever ties with the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority. It added the Tamil Tigers to Canada’s list of outlawed terrorist groups and committed to rebuilding the armed forces and enhancing international security intelligence gathering efforts. The largest counter-terrorism sweep in Canadian history, the round-up of the Toronto 17 (later 18, following the arrest of yet another suspect), took place under the Conservative watch, and Prime Minister Harper said on the day after the arrests, “It is a dangerous world and we cannot escape it by turning a blind eye to it.” Canadian attitudes about terrorism may have also hardened since the arrests, with 62 percent agreeing in a survey that without national security, civil liberties were no more than theoretical. Or maybe not. Following the Toronto arrests, Senator Colin Kenny recalled participating on a hotline radio show on terrorism. Of the fifteen callers, fourteen said they were not concerned about terrorism and the fifteenth said if anything were to happen, the Americans would take care of it. “As a general proposition,” CSIS Director Jim Judd testified, “I am not sure that the average Canadian understands many of these issues.”

In a paper published three weeks after the arrests in Toronto, the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. optimistically declared that “any perception of Canadian complacency about terrorism within its borders is now behind

us.” The government certainly encouraged that perception by sending a team of senior officials to Washington to spread the word that all was well. But as Kenny, Chairman of the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, wrote in the *National Post*, despite the government’s rush to reassure, major problems remained unaddressed. The RCMP needed as many as five thousand more personnel, and CSIS remained short-staffed as well, he said. He said it would probably take Canada a decade to “get up to speed” on monitoring and countering threats at Canada’s airports, sea ports, borders and inside neighborhoods where extremism incubates. He criticized the government’s rush to reassure Canadians and their allies.

“The public doesn’t need calming,” he said. “The public needs the truth.”