



**CDFAI**

CANADIAN DEFENCE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

# **Canada's New Challenges Facing Terrorism at Home**

by Michael G. Zekulin  
December, 2014



# POLICY PAPER

---

## **Canada's New Challenges Facing Terrorism at Home**

by Michael G. Zekulin  
Fellow, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary

December, 2014



Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)

©2014 Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
ISBN: 978-1-927573-18-1

## ► **Executive Summary**

---

Three days in October brought Islamic-inspired terrorism to Canada's doorstep and showed the extent of the dangers we face moving forward. This paper analyzes the attacks that occurred in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Ottawa and identifies two real challenges that arise from these incidents. The first challenge we face has to do with the types of attacks we witnessed, and what this means for the future. The nature of the terrorist threat facing Canada and Canadians has changed and the subsequent reality is that detecting and disrupting future attacks has become exponentially more difficult. The second challenge we face is how we respond to these attacks, both from a policy perspective and to a lesser degree a societal one. It highlights how Canada has thus far not shown any initiative addressing this problem but simultaneously recognizes the danger for overreaction exists. It cautions against a knee-jerk reaction and an expansion of short-term security focused legislation. While this must be part of the discussion, the challenges posed by Islamic-inspired terrorism will require a broad multi-faceted approach that addresses this threat in the short, medium and long-term.





**O**n October 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Martin Couture-Rouleau struck down two members of the Canadian Armed Forces with his car killing Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent. It was later revealed that Couture-Rouleau went by the online moniker Ahmad LeConverti and had converted to Islam in the previous year. The RCMP, well aware that he had adopted radical and extremist beliefs,<sup>1</sup> were sufficiently concerned he was intending to travel abroad to join The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS/ISIL) that they had actively intervened and seized his passport. Two days later, on Wednesday October 23<sup>rd</sup> in Ottawa, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau drove to the Ottawa War Memorial and fatally shot Corporal Nathan Cirillo. He then proceeded to the Centre Block of Parliament, the heart of Canada's government, where he was confronted and killed in a shoot-out with security personnel. Again, RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson would reveal Zehaf-Bibeau had left a video indicating his identification with ISIS's ideology and that Canada's recent decision to join the Western led airstrikes against ISIS was the reason he had conducted his attack.<sup>2</sup>

These two tragic and unfortunate events have dramatically impacted the psyche of all Canadians. Unfortunately, they were inevitable. These two attacks represent the fulfillment of a promise made more than a decade ago by al-Qaida whereby Canada, identified as part of "The West," was guilty by association and a priority target for Islamic terrorists.<sup>3</sup> Until Mr. Couture-Rouleau's attack, Canada, along with Australia, represented the only two states on that initial list that had managed to avoid a successful terrorist attack, having disrupted several plots. More recently, the threat was renewed and although the group threatening the West and Canada has changed the underlying message remains the same.

On September 21<sup>st</sup> 2014, approximately one month before Couture-Rouleau's attack, ISIS issued a call to anyone identifying with their fight, suggesting that they should conduct attacks in Canada.<sup>4</sup> These recent attacks are a stark reminder that Canada is, and will remain, a target for Islamic-inspired terrorism. While the situation is complex and will continue to evolve, this should not prevent us from examining how in a span of two days, two incidents changed our perceptions of the threat posed by Islamic-inspired terrorism to Canada and Canadians. This policy paper provides some thoughts on what we should expect moving forward and identifies two immediate concerns. First, the type of attacks Canada and our allies can expect in the future and the challenges they present, and second, the debate surrounding how we should respond to this threat.

---

<sup>1</sup> CBC News, Tuesday October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, "Martin Couture-Rouleau, hit-an-run driver arrested by RCMP in July," accessed 02/11/2014 from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/martin-couture-rouleau-hit-and-run-driver-arrested-by-rcmp-in-july-1.2807078>

<sup>2</sup> CBS News, Monday October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, "Ottawa gunman spoke of religion, Canadian foreign policy in video," accessed 02/11/2014 from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ottawa-gunman-spoke-of-religion-canadian-foreign-policy-in-video>

<sup>3</sup> The first such threat was issued in November 2002 in an open letter "To the Allies of the America," in Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, (Verso, London, 2005), pp. 173-75. A second threat was issued in 2006 warning Canada about their participation in the Afghanistan mission. National Post, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006, "Al-Qaeda warns Canada," accessed 03/11/2014 from <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=e9f20f44-ec19-470c-9ac3-6c79218d4d91>

<sup>4</sup> Stewart Bell, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014, "ISIS urges jihadists to attack Canadians," accessed 03/11/2014 from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/09/21/isis-urges-jihadists-to-attack-canadians-you-will-not-feel-secure-in-your-bedrooms>



One positive that materializes from these two tragic incidents is it provides a starting point to begin understanding the threats we face as well as a starting point regarding how we should respond, because the reality is that this will remain a threat for the foreseeable future. First, one obvious point must be reiterated: Islamic-inspired terrorism is terrorism pursued by a minute number of individuals who have been motivated by a very specific and radical interpretation of Islam. It is not representative of Islam or Muslims, the overwhelming majority who are repulsed and horrified by these ideas which have been “hijacked” by a small few. Second, this is not about al-Qaida. It is also not about ISIS. Islamic-inspired terrorism is larger than any one group; it is an idea, a set of narratives that evolves and spreads and needs to be confronted and challenged. The global jihadist narrative transcended al-Qaida and will continue to grow and spread beyond whatever the future holds for ISIS.

The first point we need to accept is that the Islamic terrorism paradigm has shifted and this represents a significant challenge. Al-Qaida's vision following 9/11 was focused on a continuation of large-scale, sophisticated terrorist attacks against the West. In the mid-2000s these types of attacks occurred in Madrid (2004), London (2005) and were disrupted in Melbourne, Sydney (2005) and Toronto (2006). Tracing the evolution of Islamic-inspired terrorist plots and attacks between 2006 and 2011 we observe what would more accurately be described as a devolution whereby larger scale and more sophisticated attacks conducted by larger groups began shifting to smaller groups, using less sophisticated means focusing on smaller and more realistic targets.<sup>5</sup> Canada may have been lulled into a false sense of security because during this period, intelligence and law enforcement were effective at preventing several attacks.<sup>6</sup>

The devolution of these plots and attacks has changed the actors to radicalized individuals plotting and conducting primitive attacks. Herein lays our greatest concern and challenge: these attacks are nearly impossible to detect and prevent. Larger sophisticated attacks plotted by multiple individuals are logistically much more difficult to organize and provide numerous opportunities for intelligence agencies and law enforcement to intervene. Multiple parties are forced to coordinate with each other, widening the circle of those involved, and increasing the possibility that their discussions or meetings will offer indicators about their intentions. Larger sophisticated attacks require more resources, need to be tested and potential targets need to be vetted and studied, again forcing these individuals to surface where they risk exposure and

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael Zekulin, “Islamic-Inspired Homegrown Terrorism: What We Know and What it Means Moving Forward,” *Occasional Research Paper #8*, (Calgary: Calgary Center for Military and Strategic Studies, 2013).

For the United States see James Carafano, Steve Bucci and Jessica Zuckerman, 2012, “Fifty terror plots foiled since 9/11: The homegrown threat and the long war on terrorism,” Heritage Foundation: Washington DC; Jerome Bjelopera, 2013, “American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat,” Congressional Research Service: Washington DC, p. 1; 10. For Australia see Sam Mullins, 2001, “Islamist Terrorism and Australia: An Empirical Examination of the Homegrown Threat,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 23: pp. 254-285. For Europe see Tomas Precht, 2007, “Home-Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe,” Danish Ministry of Justice, p. 15; Edwin Bakkar, 2007, “Jihadi Terrorists in Europe,” CSCP Paper: The Hague; Lorenzo Vidino, 2011, “Radicalization, Linkage and Diversity: Current Trends in Terrorism in Europe,” RAND Corporation: Santa Monica; Petter Nesser, 2008, “Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared and Executed Terrorist Attacks,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:10, pp924-926; Petter Nesser, 2011, Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe Update 2008-2010, accessed 06/07/2013 from <http://www.ffi.no/no/Prosjekter/Terra/Publikasjoner/Documents/Petter%20Nesser%20-%20Chronology%20of%20Jihadism%20in%20Western%20Europe%20Update%202008-2010%20for%20FFI%20web.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Zekulin, “Islamic-Inspired Homegrown Terrorism: What We Know and What it Means Moving Forward,” *Occasional Research Paper #8*, (Calgary: Calgary Center for Military and Strategic Studies, 2013).



detection. This profile is now the exception. It has been replaced by smaller groups or individual lone-wolves that have been more likely than not self-radicalized and content to conduct attacks relying on simple everyday tools such as a car, a knife or even a gun. This scenario is the one ISIS has been publicly advocating, encouraging their supporters in the West to create terror wherever they can and by using whatever means at their disposal.<sup>7</sup> It is also a pattern we observe from recent attacks on our allies. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013, British Army soldier Fusilier Lee Rigby was attacked and killed by two converts as they attempted to decapitate him with a butcher knife.<sup>8</sup> Nearly one year later, an individual recently returned from Syria, attacked civilians at the Jewish Museum of Belgium with a firearm.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Australia disrupted an alleged plot to behead civilians in the streets in September 2014.<sup>10</sup>

How do we determine who might pose a threat to Canada and Canadians? This is simultaneously the most important and the most difficult question to answer. The terrorism literature has very few concrete conclusions about radicalization. We recognize it is a process and that radical beliefs develop and progress through a series of steps.<sup>11</sup> However, we have little understanding about the internal mechanisms beyond this simple conceptualization. We know it is a very individualistic process and what speaks to one individual may have little influence on others. This prevents us from creating a profile of those who might be susceptible to radicalization, or those who might progress from thoughts to action. Unfortunately this is the norm and not the exception for those studying terrorism. Efforts as far back as the 1970s could not find the terrorist profile,<sup>12</sup> and similar frustrations emerged during the late 1990s when efforts were undertaken to establish a profile for those who might become suicide bombers. Profiles that showed initial promise became inaccurate very quickly.<sup>13</sup>

Not every individual who starts down this path of radicalization will act upon these beliefs. Part of our challenge is examining individuals who have become radicalized and being able to determine which ones might actually become operational and pose a real threat. This assumption might need to be re-visited in relation to how ISIS's message has changed over the past few months. When ISIS emerged in its current form in Syria and Iraq in early 2012, they were pursuing a regional objective: to establish a caliphate. Their initial message was primarily

---

<sup>7</sup> Josh Levs, Monday September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, "Western allies reject ISIS leader's threat against their civilians," accessed 04/11/2014 from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isis-threatens-west>

<sup>8</sup> Haroon Siddique, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013, "Drummer Lee Rigby died of multiple wounds," accessed 14/09/2014 from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/29/drummer-lee-rigby-woolwich-postmortem>

<sup>9</sup> John Lichfield and Lizzie Dearden, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, "Brussels Jewish Museum attack," accessed 13/09/2014 from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/brussels-jewish-museum-attack-man-arrested-in-marseille-in-connection-with-shooting-of-four-people-9467318.html>

<sup>10</sup> Edward Johnson, Wednesday September 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, "ISIS plot to be-head citizens behind pre-dawn anti-terror raids in Sydney," accessed 05/11/2014 from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/09/17/isis-plot-to-behead-citizen-behind-sydney-anti-terror-raids-australian-pm>

<sup>11</sup> Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* Vol. 60, No. 2 (2005): 161-169; Randy Borum, "Understanding Terrorist Psychology" in Andrew Silke (ed.) *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2010), accessed 04/12/2010 from [http://works.bepress.com/randy\\_borum/45](http://works.bepress.com/randy_borum/45)

<sup>12</sup> In 1977, Charles Russell and Bowman Miller created a "terrorist profile" based on the comprehensive examination of over 350 individual terrorists across 18 different groups. The profile was obsolete as newer terrorists were analyzed in subsequent years. Charles Russell and Bowman Miller, 1977, "Profile of a Terrorist," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1: 1, pp. 17 – 34; Also see Randy Borum, "The Psychology of Terrorism," (Tampa: University of South Florida, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Ami Pedahzur, "Suicide Terrorism," (London: Polity Press, 2005); Mia Bloom, "Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).



designed to attract radicalized Westerners to travel abroad and join their fight. Traveling abroad does not necessarily equate with a desire to attack Canada or Canadians, even should they return. However, as the West became involved in airstrikes ISIS changed their message, imploring their sympathizers to conduct attacks in their own countries against whatever targets they could. This changing message has potentially created a second, different wave of individuals whose radicalization may be based predominantly on this more recent message that clearly indicates what the expected action should be. There will be much less ambiguity surrounding the motivations of this newer cohort. Despite the challenges, intelligence agencies and law enforcement have demonstrated success tracking that first group, individuals wanting to travel or had travelled abroad and returned or were in contact with other individuals back in Canada via social media.<sup>14</sup> Individuals who are receptive to the recent message have not necessarily travelled and are not traceable by our earlier tactics. Further, those who may have designs on attacking us are not static: they learn, evolve and adapt, changing their behaviours to avoid identification and detection thus negating the effectiveness of some of our tools. The analogy is a chess game where each side is attempting to think five moves ahead of the other in order to gain the advantage.

The second threat we face is from ourselves, specifically how we respond to these terrorist attacks. One real danger is that we overcompensate and rely too heavily on increased surveillance and detention measures. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies play an important role in keeping Canada, and Canadians, safe, but should be viewed as one layer – more accurately the last layer – of defence. Increasing the surveillance and detention powers of these agencies<sup>15</sup> may need to be discussed, but this must be done as part of a broader strategy. The broader strategy is where Canada has failed to live up to expectations.<sup>16</sup>

A Canadian response needs to focus on three separate aspects that, when combined, provide a basis for keeping Canadians safe in the short, medium and long-term. The first is to address and prevent the next generation of radicals from emerging. Canada has yet to release its national counter-radicalization strategy, something all of our closest allies have already done. Counter-radicalization strategies are designed to prevent individuals from starting down the path towards radical ideas and beliefs and focuses on providing counter-narratives to the ideas suggested by groups such as ISIS and others. It also intervenes early in the radicalization process before radical ideas become hardened. While it may not prevent all cases of radicalization, it will minimize the number of radicalized individuals we will subsequently have to deal with later. This will require significant consultation and likely the acceptance that government has to play a more supportive role, deferring to, and assisting the communities who are much better positioned to deal with this task. The second aspect focuses on those who are radicalized and attempting to move into the action phase. So far this has manifested itself in individuals trying to leave and join groups fighting abroad. Government has felt intense pressure to address this concern and its emphasis has been on seizing the passports of those wishing to travel abroad. This may require some fine-tuning because currently the

---

<sup>14</sup> Tonda MacCharles, Wednesday October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014, "RCMP tracking 90 individuals in terrorism probes," accessed 06/11/2014 from

[http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/10/08/rcmp\\_tracking\\_90\\_individuals\\_in\\_terrorism\\_probes.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/10/08/rcmp_tracking_90_individuals_in_terrorism_probes.html)

<sup>15</sup> Jordan Press and Dylan Robertson, Tuesday November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, "Steven Blaney defends new anti-terrorism powers," accessed 07/11/2014 from <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/antiterror-bill>

<sup>16</sup> Michael Zekulin, Wednesday June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, "Made in Canada terror is real-and it is being ignored," accessed 08/11/2014 from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/homeward-bound-made-in-canada-terror/article19113802>





government's policy to seize passports lacks any meaningful accompanying steps. As is, it lacks sufficient legislative teeth to detain, even temporarily, those whose passports are seized and it has limited resources preventing the effective monitoring of these individuals who we have recognized as posing a significant threat by their efforts to leave in the first place.<sup>17</sup> The final prong of an overall strategy requires us to look forward and involves longer term efforts to deal with those individuals who have travelled abroad and will eventually return to Canada. This will require some form of de-radicalization strategies. De-radicalization strategies focus on confronting radicalized individuals and efforts to re-integrate them in some meaningful way back into society. Again, some of our allies have already started experimenting with various measures in anticipation of this reality.<sup>18</sup>

The last and potentially most serious danger facing Canadians is complacency and denial. We cannot dwell on our past successes disrupting terrorist attacks as an indicator of future results. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and continue to suggest that Canada, for some inexplicable reason is immune from this global phenomenon. Lastly, we cannot allow ourselves to oversimplify the two recent events and write them-off as tragic, but the acts of two individuals who were in some form of mental distress. Unfortunately there are no simple answers and no simple fixes. We cannot ignore the reality that Islamic-inspired terrorism will continue and remain a threat for the foreseeable future. Government, as well as Canadians, need to acknowledge this reality and move forward with a serious discussion about how we address it moving forward.

---

<sup>17</sup> Laura Payton, Wednesday October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, "Martin Couture-Rouleau case underscores passport seizure dilemma," accessed 07/11/2014 from <http://www.cbc.ca/m/news/politics/topstories/martin-couture-rouleau-case-underscores-passport-seizure-dilemma-1.2807239>

<sup>18</sup> Ayan Sheik, Wednesday September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Denmark unveils de-radicalization program for jihadi fighters," accessed 06/11/2014 from <http://www.cbc.ca/m/news/politics/topstories/martin-couture-rouleau-case-underscores-passport-seizure-dilemma-1.2807239> ; Also see Nick Logan, Tuesday October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, "Should Canada try a Danish plan to deal with radicals returning from Syria?" accessed 06/11/2014 from <http://globalnews.ca/news/1626263/should-canada-try-a-danish-plan-to-deal-with-radicals-returning-from-syria>



## ► **About the Author**

---

Michael Zekulin currently lectures in the Department of Political Science and is also a research fellow at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary. His research interests include all forms of terrorism including international, domestic and Islamic-inspired homegrown terrorism as well as anti-terrorism legislation, radicalization and counter-radicalization strategies. His current work examines current definitions and understandings of Islamic-inspired homegrown terrorism in an effort to refine them into more manageable typologies. Other research programs include an examination of counter-radicalization strategies from a comparative perspective and the accuracy and applicability of first generation radicalization models developed in the mid-2000s to the current wave of radicalization occurring more recently. He has published and presented several papers on terrorism as well as more traditional security issues including the stability of the Pakistani government. He also regularly provides commentary on security and terrorism related issues for the media including appearances on BBC, CBC, CNN, CTV, SunNews and Radio-Canada.



## ► **Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute**

---

CDFAI is the only think tank focused on Canada's international engagement in all its forms - diplomacy, the military, aid and trade security. Established in 2001, CDFAI's vision is for Canada to have a respected, influential voice in the international arena based on a comprehensive foreign policy, which expresses our national interests, political and social values, military capabilities, economic strength and willingness to be engaged with action that is timely and credible.

CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

In all its activities CDFAI is a charitable, nonpartisan organization, supported financially by the contributions of foundations, corporations and individuals. Conclusions or opinions expressed in CDFAI publications and programs are those of the authors and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute staff, fellows, directors, advisors, or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to CDFAI.

