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by **Sven Jurschewsky**  
March 30, 2015



# POLICY UPDATE

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**B**y enacting Bills C-51 and C-44, the Conservative government intends a much more aggressive and proactive anti-terrorist stance by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) both at home and abroad. The changes will fundamentally transform Canada's intelligence establishment. Debate in the House of Commons and in public has unsurprisingly focussed mainly on the implications for civil liberties and the associated questions of oversight and review of intelligence operations. However this emphasis does not exhaust what needs to be examined.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has stressed Jihadism as the main threat to Canada's security. Moreover, his government has defined the war on terror as largely directed against the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) in particular, and other Islamic Jihadists like Al-Qa'ida in general. This may suit the Tories' current political agenda and the electoral calculations of the Prime Minister's Office. However, there are other sources of terrorism than Islamic jihadists. Europe's most serious terrorist carnage was perpetrated by the Norwegian neo-Nazi racist, Anders Breivik. A few Canadians, and more and better organized Americans, sympathize with his views. But likely more significant in terms of risk to the public, as the recent aborted attack on a Halifax shopping centre attests, are the Columbiners. This is a virtual group of internet-linked nihilists that are inspired by and seek to emulate the outrage perpetrated by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999. There are other similar groups.

Events have shown that Canada is not immune to attacks of this kind. Since the massacre of fifteen women at l'Université de Montréal in 1989, there have been ten school shootings in Canada. These attacks are very similar to Islamic "lone wolf" attacks like Michael Zehaf-Bibeau's quixotic and suicidal assault on Parliament. Twenty-five people have been killed in school attacks; Islamic "lone-wolves" have claimed two lives. In the last twenty-five years there have been one anti-Semitic bombing, several pipeline bombings by environmental radicals, two bombings by a Quebec nationalist group, and an assassination attempt by an anti-Quebec nationalist. Going back further, Armenian nationalists have engaged in a handful of terrorist activities. The Sikh community in British Columbia has been convulsed by internal violence. Canadian Sikh terrorists bombed Narita Airport in Tokyo and brought down Air India Flight 182, events that highlighted significant short-comings in Canada's security establishment.

Identifying, tracking and disrupting the aggressive activities of these sorts of people do not fall neatly into existing institutional mandates. Local police forces, CSIS in terms of its security-based mandate, the RCMP as the Federal police force, and Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC) by reason of its SIGINT expertise and capacities all have some slice of this responsibility. Zehaf-Bibeau's assault revealed poor coordination and even an incapacity to communicate among the security forces responsible for Parliament. The quick fix of simply laying all responsibility on the RCMP as deployed by the Government is neither very efficient nor likely to have wider application. Indeed, the different parts of Canada's intelligence establishment do not as a rule cooperate very well. Relations among disparate intelligence units such as at the Department of National Defence, Public Safety Canada, Canada Border Services



Agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), as well as the better known ones, are characterized by turf wars and other forms of institutional jealousy. Information-sharing is the exception, not the rule. The Privy Council Office's Intelligence Assessment Secretariat has had, for example, great difficulty to issue jointly-agreed intelligence assessments.

But the Prime Minister is right. The primary potential security threat is Jihadist and it is important to examine why. By the same token, it is important to stress that as far as Canada is concerned, Islamic terrorism does not pose an existential threat, either now or in prospect.

The metaphor that has been used to describe the struggle with radical Jihadism since 9/11 has been that of war, and with that, the application of destructive means as the way to victory. This perpetrates yet another serious mistake of America's George W. Bush administration. The struggle with Jihadism as a military enterprise has profoundly obscured both the political nature of the confrontation and the regrettable attractiveness of the Jihadist's program that has worked to broadcast its influence very widely indeed.

The modern era of terrorism can arguably be said to have begun in 1972 with the attack on the Israeli team at the Munich Olympics by Black September, which was essentially a gang, albeit one organized specifically to wage a terrorist struggle. While probably operating under the auspices of Fatah, it had no wider footprint than its members. Black September's objective in Munich was to strike a blow on behalf of the Palestinian people, but the group was also alive to the political ramifications. The name, Black September, referred to King Hussein of Jordan's perceived betrayal of the Palestinians in 1970; the code-word for the Munich attack was "Ikrit and Biran", the names of two Palestinian Christian villages that had been ethnically cleansed by the Haganah in 1948. The former tried to draw attention to failings of the Arab states as far as the Palestinians were concerned and the latter, rather strangely, tried to appeal to Western Christian concerns and sensibilities. Israel responded with Operation Wrath of God to assassinate everyone connected with the outrage and Germany organized its crack anti-terror unit, the GSG-9. The war on terrorists had begun.

Since then Israel and its allies have militarily defeated every terrorist organization that has arisen. But it can be fairly asked whether Israel is safer now that it was before Munich. Terrorism has simply not accepted defeat and faded away. It morphed into Jihadism and successfully spread the bacillus of terror and fear.

What is certainly true is that where we in North America were initially mere observers, Palestinian terrorism was an immediate and serious problem for Europe and Israel. The major terrorist threats in the United States were hard-right fanatics like Timothy McVeigh or luddites like the Unabomber. In Canada, we had much less to worry about. Those of us that lived in Quebec in the 1960s and '70s contended with the Front de liberation du Québec which, until the gruesome murder of Pierre Laporte, had been more concerned with blowing up symbols of Anglo rule than killing people. In the broad scheme of things, Canadians lived in peace, serenity



and relative ignorance of the true state of the world. But this isolation ended spectacularly with 9/11.

With every iteration, terrorist groups have become more extreme and less morally constrained, better equipped, financed and organized, more politically and technically astute. Most important has been the increasingly central role religion has come to play both as justification for terrorism and as supplying the organizing principles for what is to follow victory. Redressing the plight of the Palestinian people has receded and exists now mainly as a means of recruitment. What the terrorists lost militarily they more than made up for politically, gathering ever more recruits and financing. Jihadists are now present not only in the Middle East but also in East and West Africa, the Maghreb, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe and the Indian subcontinent. We now have reason to worry about our young people going to fight for ISIS and similar groups, as many as 10,000 North American and Western European youths have done. And we worry with reason about them coming home to carry on Jihad in our precincts. From this perspective we are losing the War on Terrorism. What was once a distant struggle is now also being fought at home.

Politics, for these purposes, amounts to espousing a certain point of view or ideology and an end state or goal - usually the attainment of political power toward the establishment of a given variety of polity. ISIS and other Jihadist organizations may differ tactically and strategically as to whether attack the Great Satan (i.e. the U.S.) or the Little Satans (i.e. the dictatorships of the Middle East) but they are united in the ultimate objective: the re-establishment of the *ummah* (i.e. the collective of all Muslims) in a Caliphate directed by the strictest and most traditional interpretation of *sharia* as the law of God.

It profits us little to point out that Jihadists still amount to small fraction of Muslims. Nor will the contrary, less soundly based view that Jihadism amounts to the spiritual essence of Islam, help us to carry the day. The barbarity of ISIS and the groups like it is not merely a response to the strictures of a certain arcane interpretation of Islamic scripture, it is also, and more importantly, part of an increasingly successful effort to drive wedges between Muslims and others, to encourage the West to demonize Islam, and to draw Muslims to ISIS' side, much as Shia depredations and revenge drove Iraq's Sunnis into the camp of ISIS.

From this perspective, the military aspect of the struggle against terrorists like ISIS must be complimented by a political struggle. We must come to understand why the message of the Jihadists is so attractive to Muslims and Western youth.

Very little work has been done and little of that is useful.

It is possible to make some suggestions:

- Western European polities (and to a somewhat lesser extent in North America) are being increasingly characterized by xenophobia. But the causal relationship to rising Muslim radicalisation - is it a push or a pull phenomenon - has yet to be determined. Nor have effective policies to combat anti-Muslim attitudes been enunciated. Racism in



Western societies has not been defeated. What sensibly counts as integration and the policies to that effect have yet to be elaborated.

- Economic factors may play a role. Unemployment in Paris' Muslim faubourgs tops forty per cent. Youth unemployment everywhere is an unaddressed issue.
- Religious sentiments are on the rise. In the Christian world, conservative and muscular dispensations like Pentecostalism are enjoying very significant growth while ministers in more traditional churches preach to emptying pews. In Asia, Buddhism in Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka has become militant and intolerant. Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, was part of the reason for the resounding victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the recent Indian federal elections. Even in China religious observance is on the rise. Is this global phenomenon a reaction to rapid social and economic transformation arising out of globalisation? Or does it have some other source?
- Our focus on human rights is increasingly seen as hypocritical. A U.S. Senate report admits to torture having taken place and no one is charged. Africans are arraigned before the International Court of Justice but its processes are deemed too politically charged for Israelis and Americans. There is much more to be said in this accounting and the corrosive effect it has had for claims of values-based policies.

These sorts of things provide the soil in which the propaganda of ISIS has proven to be so successful. ISIS may have more than 40,000 Twitter accounts but as that expert and successful revolutionary Mao Tse-tung once said, "One cannot make the revolution by the method of pulling up the rice shoots." Revolutions and revolutionaries are created by existing conditions, not the other way around.

So it seems clear: we must confront ISIS and the other Jihadists politically. The messaging, whatever it turns out to be, will be nuanced and multifaceted covering economic and social, as well as moral and spiritual aspects.

It is fair to ask whether CSIS as an organization is capable of directing such a struggle abroad, even assuming the domestic government ministries and agencies have done their part and are on board. DFATD's capacity to play its role is in question. With financial cutbacks, hiring freezes and promotion processes unrelated to actual performance, there has been a collapse of expertise. Experience of the external environment has declined as precipitously as the opportunities for postings abroad. Desk officers are often on casual or term contracts, raising additional questions of security and reliability. Loyalty to the institution can no longer be taken as a given. Edward Snowden was a contract employee. Reporting from missions is no longer based on first-hand research with Canadian interests and objectives in mind. Media reports now are the raw material for assessments. Moreover, as far as Islamic fundamentalism is concerned, the Department has blinded itself. The so-called Acceptable Use Policy blocks Jihadist sites as well as porn. Parenthetically, neo-Nazi and other far right-wing sites are not blocked. DFATD's intelligence capacity has been emasculated and is no longer worthy of the name. Other government departments and agencies are no better placed to help carry forward a political mandate against Jihadism, domestically or abroad.



Then there is the matter of whether it is wise to include in a single agency both foreign and domestic intelligence capacities. Among Western states, only the Netherlands and New Zealand have taken this route. The required skill sets are analogous but far from identical. Foreign language at the domestic speaker level is a *sine qua non*; operating effectively in Lagos, as an example, is a very different thing from working in Toronto's Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Domestic intelligence is formally bound by law (and rests on the assumption that oversight and review are functioning properly). Illegality is in principle a watchword of clandestine work abroad. How can both be included in a single corporate culture without the latter eventually leaking into the former to the disadvantage of civil liberties? Knowledge is power, as has been said. An institution like the one proposed in the legislation would know a great deal indeed.

Intelligence agencies are to be feared for two very simple and related reasons. The vetting process ensures that the personnel is comprised of patriots. The knowledge of an intelligence agency, the information it has gathered, cannot be shared without defeating the means and purpose of its collection. Patriots will always be tempted to act on that information. The RCMP officers that burned barns and broke into offices in the 1970s did so in the belief they were defending Canada and not for any trivial or personal gain. Their political judgement was skewed by their love of country. The results were disastrous.

CSIS has no permanent cadre of officers experienced in work abroad. CSIS officers are posted on a single-assignment basis. Most CSIS officers have not engaged in clandestine work externally. Those that have been assigned to embassies mainly trawl the visa line and exchange packages of reports with their local homologues. It is also an open question whether CSIS has the political *nous* to frame and carry out a successful political agenda. CSIS has proved to be able to catch "bad guys" domestically, but this is a very different task: can it identify "bad guys" abroad and persuade them to stop being "bad guys"? Does CSIS have the capacities, for example, needed to persuade the citizens of Mosul to turn against ISIS which they had previously welcomed into their midst?

All this to say that while CSIS has done an acceptable job domestically, as matters stand, it is not suited to carry out a War on Terrorism abroad. Can CSIS be reconstituted to take on and carry out effectively both the information gathering and political tasks needed to defeat Jihadism? Probably, given enough time and money. But, given the risks, wouldn't it better, safer and more effective to mount a proper foreign intelligence service to carry forward the struggle? We have the time and resources to do the job right.

## ► **About the Author**

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**Sven Jurschewsky** is a former Canadian Foreign Service officer. He has had postings to New Delhi, Zagreb, Vienna, Lagos, Bonn and Berlin. While posted to Beijing in 1999, he was tasked to effect Canada's recognition of the DPRK in support of U.S. President Bill Clinton's "soft landing policy". To that end he enjoyed remarkable assistance from China and unusually good access in the DPRK. Headquarters assignments included preparations for the Rio Earth Summit, preparation of NAFTA feasibility studies (on secondment to the Department of Finance), and participation in Paris Club debt re-schedulings. Jurschewsky also headed the headquarters unit responsible for intelligence assessment and related matters. Before joining Canada's Foreign Service, he taught philosophy at the University of Toronto.





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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.

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