Position Paper: Canada and Militant Islamic Groups

A) Canadian policy should not paint all militant Islamist groups with the same brush:
   1. Canada should ascribe credibility to the groups that merit and desire it. Many groups enjoy widespread popular support, have moderate elements, and seek to engage politically. By validating the legitimacy of such groups, Canada may be enabled to play a more significant role in the future.
   2. Canada must encourage and “reward” moderate elements in all groups, even those that shun political participation. Such moderation enables greater regional stability.
   3. Canada must seek to develop relationships with all political players, except in the most extreme cases. Such relationships are very important long-term, as they give Canada sway with groups that command a following within their host populations for important social and political reasons. Many of the groups in question have existed for decades; ignoring them smacks of arrogance and will not make them disappear. E.g. Canada had a relationship with the PLO while it was considered a “terrorist” group; this relationship continues today with important advantages to Canada.

B) Canadian policy should reflect an understanding of the roots of origin of each militant Islamist group, and should validate legitimate grievances when appropriate:
   1. Canada policy may oppose the “means” used by some groups, but could nevertheless validate the “cause” of such groups. E.g. valid concerns about a) ethnic discrimination, b) religious discrimination, c) denial of freedom, d) denial of political expression, etc. By validating the “cause,” Canada establishes greater trust, and is better able to serve as a neutral broker.
   2. Canada must avoid politically-motivated or counterproductive “labelling” of Islamist groups that is aimed at discrediting or marginalizing such groups. Reactionary Canadians relish digging up decades-old documents, or finding obscure low-level leaders with anti-Semitic views. Canada is better served by listening to what the pragmatic top-level leaders of these groups are saying today, and acknowledging the shifts in stances.

C) Canadian policy should work to avoid the conditions that create fertile ground for establishment of militant Islamist groups:
   1. Canadian developmental policy must provide stick and carrot incentives for Canadian assistance and trade to ensure oppressive regimes introduce reforms progressively.
   2. Canada must reduce the sale of military supplies to the Middle East. The current Egyptian and Saudi governments are consumers of Canadian arms, yet are known for human rights abuses against their populations. Such sales are immoral. Western arms are far too abundant in this region where military force is more often used against domestic civilian opponents rather than foreign aggressors’ armies.
   3. Canadian policy must oppose ill-considered Western military interventions. In recent years, there are multiple cases of anarchy evolving out of inappropriate Western military interventions: Afghanistan, Iraq, etc. Humanitarian, diplomatic or economic interventions hold much more promise, at a much lower financial and human cost.
   4. Canadian developmental policy must help struggling, but potentially representative governments. Canada and the West have missed key opportunities in the past (e.g. Libya, Iraq, etc.) Today’s opportunities are Lebanon and Tunisia.
5. Canada must oppose large Western military bases and deployments in the Middle East. A portion of the current extremism in the Middle East grows out of resentment of Western military presence in the region. Opposition groups are also resentful that Western countries seem to favour pliable governments which sacrifice local legitimacy for foreign military aid (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.)

D) **Canadian policy must work to reduce the vulnerability of civilian populations to armed Islamic uprisings:**

1. Canada must be vocal and consistent in its condemnation of human rights abuses. While such condemnation may sometimes appear ineffective in the short term, they challenge the “might makes right” attitude of many governments and groups. They also validate and give hope to opposition groups which suffer under the abuses.

2. Again, Canada must attach economic sticks and carrots to respect for human rights. The Canadian government has signed numerous trade agreements with countries across the region. These agreements provide the opportunity to challenge human rights abuses committed against opposition organizations, or ethnic subgroups.

3. With other partners, Canada must catalogue vulnerable populations, and develop contingency plans in the event of periods of violent strife. The West seemed entirely unprepared for the atrocities committed against the Yezidis and other groups in Iraq. With a little research and planning, such catastrophes can be averted in the future.

E) **Canadian policy should seek to urgently address the most important destabilizing factors in the Middle East:**

1. The lack of any real representative rights in most Middle East governments. This was most definitely the problem which led to the rise of ISIS (in Iraq and Syria), other Islamic militant groups in Syria, Hamas (opposing Israel’s military occupation), Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, and many other groups.

2. The lack of a peace settlement between Palestinians and Israelis. Western hypocrisy vis-à-vis the human, political and human rights situation in the Israel-Palestine conflict fuels all sorts of regional discontent and political machinations. The failure by the West to act responsibly in the conflict also leaves the over five million Palestinian refugees in the region very vulnerable. Palestinian refugees residing in Syria, for example, have suffered terribly over the past several years.

3. The lack of resolution of Kurdish aspirations of self-determination. While less discussed than other issues, the failure to address legitimate Kurdish aspirations for autonomy destabilizes Syria, Iraq and Turkey, and distorts regional politics. This is most notably manifest in Turkey’s ambivalence towards ISIS’s actions against Kurds in Iraq.

4. The Western double standard on human rights. The West does not apply a consistent standard to human rights abuses in the Middle East. Crimes against one group are ignored, while other crimes elicit billions of dollars of military involvement. And all too often, economic interests seem to be the driver of such involvement.

5. The ongoing perception of destructive Western meddling in Middle East politics. The selective military interventions by the US in recent years have only led to a deepening of local crises. The over 45 military bases that the US and others maintain in the area are also a source of consternation for many. Canadian policy should address these realities and perceptions, and should propose a different course forward.

**For more Information...**

For more information, please consult CJPME Website (www.cjpme.org) or call CJPME at 438-380-5410.