



Just the Facts: Scare Tactics

WHY IS THE HARPER GOVERNMENT STIRRING UP FEARS OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM?

Operation **IMPACT**

- Began in Fall 2014. This is Canada's contribution to a US-led military mission in Syria & Iraq whose goal is to "degrade and defeat" ISIS (a.k.a. ISIL, Islamic State)
- 6 fighter jets, 3 other planes, about 600 personnel
- Harper government's justifications have generally repeated 2 themes:
 - Brutality: ISIS's "murderous rampage", "campaign of terror" across Iraq and Syria, atrocities to children, women, religious minorities
 - Threat: ISIS has made "specific threats against Canada and Canadians"

Bill C-51, a.k.a. **Anti-Terrorism Act**

- Introduced in Parliament by Harper government January, 2015. (not yet a law)
- Allows Canadian government agencies to gather & exchange info re "activities that undermine the security of Canada"
- Bans advocating or promoting terrorism
- Allows the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS, Canada's spy agency) to act, inside & outside Canada, to reduce/disrupt threats to the security of Canada
- Defines activities that threaten security of Canada in very broad, vague language, e.g.:
 - "Interfering with the federal government's "capability in relation to the economic or financial stability of Canada"
 - "covert foreign-influenced activities"
 - "interference with critical infrastructure"
- But says that this "does not include lawful advocacy, protest, dissent and artistic expression"

Historical background: real and not-so-real motivations for these anti-terror measures

- In response to al-Qaeda led terrorist attacks in the US on 9/11/2001, the US, with varying degrees of support and participation from other countries, launched military actions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq 2003
- Canada participated only in the Afghan war, from 2001-11: 40,000 Canadians served, 158 died, more than 1,800 wounded, plus many w/ PTSD. Cost Canada at least \$18B
- Aftermath of US invasion of Iraq: instability, civil war among various ethnic and religious groups. A group emerged called al-Qaeda in Iraq, which eventually evolved into ISIS
- 2011 Syria, controlled by Assad government (not Islamist, very oppressive: has used torture & chemical weapons against own people), erupted into a multi-sided civil war. By 2013, many Western governments were becoming concerned by:
 - brutality, large numbers of civilian casualties & refugees
 - inflow of groups from neighbouring Iraq (especially ISIS)
 - inflow of "**foreign fighters**" from Muslim states and European/Western countries

- December 2013: London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalization issued much-cited report claiming that there were more than 10,000 foreign fighters in Syria. Fear that Syrian war would become “an incubator for a new generation of terrorists”, like Afghanistan in 1980s (where Osama bin Laden was a foreign fighter)
- September 2014. English-speaking spokesman in ISIS video from Syria urged supporters to kill Canadians (and Americans, Australians, French, other Europeans)
- October 7, 2014 after Harper Conservatives used their majority to stop further debate, the Commons passed a **motion to support Operation IMPACT** for up to 6 months (Conservatives voting for, NDP & Liberals against)
- October 8, 2014: NBC reported that US intelligence intercepted conversations by ISIS wannabes who discussed attacking targets in Canada
- October 20, 2014 St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec: 25 year old Muslim convert known to anti-terrorism authorities for prior attempt to go to Syria deliberately drove into two soldiers near base; one died. Described by federal officials as “ISIS-inspired attack”
- October 22, 2014 Ottawa: 32 year old drifter w/ history of drugs, crime, mental illness fatally shot soldier at war memorial, then stormed Parliament building, wounding one person
- December 2014. Internet video: Ottawa man, Muslim convert, with ISIS in Syria, called for attacks on Canadian targets
- January 2015 **Bill C-51 introduced**
- February 2015: al-Qaeda-“linked” Somali group al Shabaab, issued video urging people to attack shopping malls; West Edmonton Mall was one of the malls listed. Expert: “nothing to indicate that this is anything other than a fantasy.” Nevertheless, the threat led some schools to change/cancel planned trips
- March 30, 2015. After Conservatives again used their majority to stop further debate, the Commons approved a **motion to extend Operation IMPACT for 12 more months**; Conservatives voted for, NDP & Liberals voted against. NDP opposition introduced an amendment calling for government to also boost humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Syria and to provide “support for communities and institutions working on de-radicalization and counter-radicalization”, but it was defeated by Conservatives & Liberals

Criticisms of Operation IMPACT

- Its objectives, time frame, and potential final cost and impact are unclear
- We should take the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as lessons: risk of spending large amounts of money & lives for uncertain/unintended results that may not leave the situation better, and that may antagonize Muslim populations & make Canada a terrorist target
- Cost of operation, up to March 31, 2015: \$122M. Estimated costs of a further 12 months: \$243-351M Compare the amounts the federal government spent last year on:
 - First Nations Supplementary Health Benefits: \$195M
 - Grants to organizations combatting homelessness: \$148M
 - Transfers to provinces for youth justice services: \$141M
 - Grants to develop early intervention programs for Aboriginal pre-schoolers: \$33M

Criticisms of Bill C-51

- The Bill has been criticized by a long list of individuals and groups, both left- and right-wing, including law professors, former prime ministers, civil rights organizations, labour organizations, Aboriginal groups, and journalists. The federal Privacy Commissioner is also a critic; the Conservatives blocked him from participating in parliamentary hearings on the bill
- Government has not explained why these new powers are necessary, why existing laws are not sufficient. The Public Safety Minister orchestrated the public release of the Parliament

Hill attacker's cellphone video and used it to justify & whip up support for Bill C-51; but when asked how the Bill would have prevented the attack, he had no answer

- The Bill does not provide for adequate oversight (e.g. by parliament or an independent body) of how CSIS & RCMP use the enhanced powers the Bill gives them
- The Bill leaves too much open to interpretation by security authorities. They might use their enhanced powers to harass Muslims & Muslim organizations (as happened after 9/11)
- Security agencies might target legitimate peaceful protests by labour, environmental, and Aboriginal organizations. In a 2014 RCMP report, obtained by Greenpeace, the RCMP expressed concerns about "threat" posed by "foreign funded environmental extremists" opposed to pipelines, oil & gas industry
- Gwynne Dyer, Canadian historian, journalist, ex-soldier, leftist, says that the best response to terrorism is not to panic. A repressive, militaristic overreaction is exactly what terrorists want. Western bombing in Muslim countries feeds into Islamist recruiting messages that the West hates Islam, kills Muslims. Canada lost 2 people to Islamic terrorism at home in 2014. We lose many, many more each month in car accidents. What truly frightens him is not terrorism, but climate change
- Right wing Maclean's writer Colby Cosh, "Islam is more or less an excuse...the trick is not to let terror take hold of us, to maintain our democratic temperament in the face of what are essentially accidents"
- Michael den Tandt, right-wing National Post reporter, links Harper government stirring up fears of ISIS with Harper's remarks in March 2015 that guns needed for safety in rural areas, stirring up fear that a future non-Conservative government will take their guns away. Meant to frighten, motivate the Conservative "base". Conservatives are scared-- of losing the next election

Should we be scared of "homegrown" Islamist terror, e.g. from returned "foreign fighters"?

- Gwynne Dyer is right: more than 2,500 Canadians die each year in transport accidents
- Over the last 30 years, more than 30 Aboriginal women a year have been murdered; government. action on this issue has been slow, but action against the ISIS threat has been quick
- Research shows: people are more scared of risks that are unfamiliar/exotic, or risks seen as caused by humans, than they are of familiar or "natural" risks—even if the familiar and natural risks are statistically more likely to happen. Political leadership should involve trying to calm/overcome such irrational fears; it should not seek to add fuel to them
- The number of Canadian foreign fighters in Syria & Iraq is small (dozens, not hundreds). Not all, nor even most, have participated in combat roles. Many will return home disillusioned with ISIS, vulnerable, even traumatized, but they will have great credibility among potential recruits. Effective anti-terrorism should focus on identifying these people, and offering them the support they need to reintegrate into Canadian society
- Unfortunately, the Harper government's anti-terrorism policies emphasize passport revocation, detention and other punishments. This is not surprising: the Harper government's approach to crime control emphasizes punishment rather than rehabilitation, and its support for the efforts of Canadian Forces veterans to fully reintegrate into society has been dismal:
 - Canada's financial benefits for injured vets are less than those in US, UK, Australia
 - Conservatives have severely cut Veterans Affairs budget, leading to service reductions and facility closures

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Take action! Use this information to write your MP, the Prime Minister and/or any other person in power that you think can take action to ensure that this Bill does not become law. Let them know that you refuse to live in fear and you will work to ensure that our freedom of expression is protected. Get out in the community! Talk to your friends, family and co-workers. Spread this information to everyone you know – communication and awareness is highly effective in building more support.

For further information about this topic, including the sources of this fact sheet, please contact Karman Kawchuk, Research Officer, SEIU-West by email karman.kawchuk@seiuwest.ca