

Canadian government, media use alleged terrorist plot to push right-wing agenda

Keith Jones
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Since Saturday, Canadians have been subjected to saturation media coverage of the smashing of an alleged Islamist terrorist conspiracy—one that reputedly included plans to storm Canada’s parliament buildings. The government, police and press are holding up this alleged plot as proof that Canada is in the front lines of the “war on terror.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges that all of the claims of the government and the police concerning the alleged terrorist conspiracy, and the further revelations and speculations given out by the media, be treated with the utmost caution and a large degree of skepticism. None of the alleged facts presented by the authorities can be accepted uncritically as true.

The track record of government proclamations concerning similar sensational and lurid terrorist plots, from Washington’s initial account of the supposed “dirty bomb” plot of Jose Padilla to London’s chilling assertions about the terrorist aims of Jean Charles de Menezes, the Brazilian-born worker who was killed by London police in July 2005, eminently justifies a critical attitude toward the claims of the Canadian government in the current case. In these and other instances, the initial claims proved in the ensuing period to be either highly dubious or patently false.

Four hundred police officers, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RMCP) and several Toronto-area police forces, mounted a series of raids last Friday evening and Saturday morning, arresting 17 people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Five of the arrested are under the age of 18, and cannot be named under the country’s Young Offenders Act. Of the twelve adults, half are 21 or younger and all but two are 25 or younger.

The adults face a multiplicity of charges under the draconian Anti-Terrorism Act passed in December 2001, including being part of a terrorist organization, receiving training from a terrorist organization, and recruiting and training people for a terrorist organization. Six of the adults are charged with intent to cause an explosion and bodily harm.

The federal Conservative government, RCMP officials and the media have all urged Canadians to remain calm and not to stigmatize the country’s Muslim community for the alleged misdeeds of a few. But these statements are belied by their actions, which have been calculated to sow fear and panic, justify increased budgets for police and security forces, and legitimize the Canadian Armed Forces’ counter-insurgency mission in southern Afghanistan.

The government, RCMP and Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) have described the alleged conspiracy as an imminent and dire threat to Canadian lives—a chilling example of a “home-grown” form of terrorism that is especially difficult to uncover and counter. Although the authorities have been chary in revealing details of the terror plot, the media have amplified their claims in a veritable tidal wave of sensationalist reports.

In a speech before military personnel Saturday, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper welcomed the arrests, noting that his government had recently boosted spending on Canada’s security and claiming that Canada was under attack because of its democratic values. “As we have said on many occasions,” declared Harper, “Canada is not immune to the threat of terrorism.”

The liberal *Toronto Star* exemplifies the attitude that the corporate media has adopted toward the country’s Muslim community in the wake of the purported uncovering of an Islamist terrorist plot. The *Star* editorial board deplored the Saturday night vandalizing of a Toronto-area mosque, but then proclaimed that the “onus” in preventing “a possible backlash” against Muslims lies first and foremost with “the Muslim community itself.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* is not in a position to say whether there is any truth to the charges of the police and government that those arrested plotted terrorist attacks. But two important pieces of information have emerged that suggest the official claims of Canadians being in imminent danger—that the arrested men had, in the words of the RCMP assistant commissioner, “the capacity” as well as the intent to carry out mass murder—are, at the very least, grossly

overblown, and that the authorities either let the plot proceed, if it, in fact, existed, or facilitated it so as to ensure maximum media publicity.

First, it is clear that the CSIS and/or the RCMP have had some if not many of the arrested individuals under their surveillance for months, possibly years, and that senior government officials have long been aware of the security operation targeting this group. Ontario Community Safety Minister Monte Kwinter and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty were reportedly briefed by security officials “some months ago.” Comments by the interim federal Liberal Party leader, Bill Graham, who until last January’s election was a senior minister, indicate that he has known about the security operation for considerably longer. Graham told reporters the state operation against this alleged conspiracy “had been going on for a year now and certainly was something that I was aware of before.”

Two members of the alleged conspiracy were detained last summer trying to smuggle a pair of semi-automatic guns into Canada. They subsequently pleaded guilty and are now serving out their two-year sentences in prison.

According to a report in Tuesday’s *National Post*, members of Canada’s elite special operations military unit, Joint Task Force-2, were poised to raid the alleged terrorists’ rural Ontario “training camp” last winter. According to the *Post*’s source, JTF-2 commandos were deployed “within a few minutes of the camp.” The newspaper continued: “Basically they were on standby in case things got out of control and the police couldn’t handle it.” According to other press reports, the alleged terrorists used a wooded area near the village of Washago to practice with paint guns and fire off some rounds of ammunition.

Secondly, it has emerged that the alleged terrorists were the dupes of a police sting operation. Last weekend’s police raids began shortly after some members of the group received a shipment of what they thought to be three tons of ammonium nitrate garden fertilizer. One ton of this substance, as the police and press have repeatedly reminded the public, was used by Timothy McVeigh in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that slaughtered more than 150 people.

It has now emerged that undercover police delivered the substance to the alleged Toronto-area terrorists and that what they delivered was fake ammonium nitrate. This raises a whole series of questions as to when police learned the accused were seeking to obtain bomb-making material and whether police informants or agent provocateurs themselves suggested that the accused procure ammonium nitrate.

The timing of the police-security operation is highly convenient for the Harper Conservative government, which faces widespread public opposition to its plans to work more

closely with the Bush administration and extend and broaden the Canadian Armed Forces’ intervention in Afghanistan.

Parliament is also in the process of reviewing the new powers granted the police and security forces under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The RCMP and CSIS have been criticized for a number of anti-terrorist investigations, most famously the case of Mahar Arar, in which they targeted innocent individuals.

Officials from the Harper government and the Bush administration have exchanged compliments in the wake of the reputed success of last weekend’s anti-terrorism operation. Prime Minister Harper thanked the US president in a telephone conversation Monday for the help provided by US authorities. Bush administration officials are citing the events in Canada to underline their warnings of a possible terror attack in the US before the end of the year.

Prior to last weekend, only one other individual had been arrested under Canada’s new anti-terrorism legislation. The trial or trials of those arrested last weekend will in all likelihood become a test case for the new legislation, which allows prosecutors to conceal evidence from the accused and their lawyers on the grounds of protecting national security.

Counsel for the accused are already protesting that they have been prevented from meeting with their clients in private and that their clients’ presumption of innocence has been compromised. Lawyer Donald McLeod said he had been able to talk with his client only through plexiglass and only with state representatives present.

Gary Batasar, who is representing Steven Chand, a 25-year-old restaurant worker, accused Canadian authorities and the Bush administration of sowing public fear.

“It appears to me,” said Batasar, “that whether you’re in Ottawa or Toronto or Crawford, Texas or Washington, D.C., what is wanting to be instilled in the public is fear. That’s precisely why everyone is here today, and that’s unfortunate.”

He criticized Harper for voicing “happiness” at his client’s arrest. “In fact, the comments made by the prime minister himself with respect to his happiness that these persons had been arrested certainly is surprising and shocking. I believe the prime minister should keep out of the process and let justice take its course.”



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