

Alleged Toronto terrorist cell included Canadian Security Intelligence Service mole

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The revelation that the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) had an informant or mole planted within the group arrested in Toronto in early June for allegedly plotting terrorist attacks is being used by Canadian authorities and the corporate media to continue their campaign to create a climate of fear conducive to the promotion of a right-wing agenda.

Earlier this month, Mubin Shaikh admitted to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Fifth Estate* and the *Globe and Mail* that he had been working for CSIS for two years and that on its instruction he had befriended members of the Toronto group, passing himself off as someone with military expertise because he had been an army cadet and a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) reservist.

According to his own account, Shaikh first approached CSIS in 2004 in an effort to help an acquaintance charged with participating in a British bombing plot, then agreed to become an informant. He claims to have been paid \$77,000 for this service over the past two years and to be owed a further \$300,000.

Having gained the trust of Fahim Ahmed, the reputed leader of the Toronto terrorist plot, Shaikh was asked to lead a two-week training camp held in rural Ontario during December 2005. This training camp has repeatedly been cited by CSIS, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the media as proof of the Toronto group's intent and capacity to commit heinous terrorist acts.

In fact, the training camp took place entirely under the eyes of Canada's security forces. While Shaikh, the CSIS mole, led the camp, members of the Canadian Armed Forces' elite special operations force were deployed a few minutes' helicopter ride away, on the chance that Canada's security establishment decided this was the time to stage the "smashing" of the alleged terrorist cell.

The other key plank in the authorities' contention that the group had the capacity to commit mass-murder has been the charge that some of them attempted to buy large quantities of a fertilizer used in making explosives—an attempted purchase in which the seller turned out to be an undercover RCMP agent.

Shaikh claims he had no knowledge either of the plan to procure the fertilizer or of the police entrapment effort. If this is indeed the case, it begs the question of how he went from leader of a "terrorist training camp" to rank outsider in the space of only a few months.

Interestingly, during the same period of time that Shaikh was on CSIS' payroll, he was also publicly prominent as a vocal proponent of a failed attempt to convince the Ontario government to give Sharia law legal status in the settling of some family disputes.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned since this story first broke, all the claims made by the government, the security services and the media should be treated with great skepticism. At the very

least, the confirmation that a CSIS mole was operating within the alleged Toronto terrorist cell raises anew the question of the extent to which many of their alleged activities, including the attempted purchase of explosive ingredients, were not only facilitated by the authorities' deliberate inaction, but also suggested and encouraged by them.

Prior to the mole's decision to reveal his identity it was already clear that the alleged terrorist cell was the subject of police manipulation. CSIS and RCMP sources have admitted that members of the group were under surveillance for years and that arrests could have been made months prior to the early June spectacle of police sweeps, sensational headlines and heavily-armed police escorts. Instead, Canada's security-intelligence services chose to allow the terror plot to grow, the better to use it to their own and their Liberal-Conservative political masters' advantage.

Shaikh claims that the decision to publicly reveal himself to be a CSIS operative was a personal one, motivated only by the increasing suspicion surrounding his name within Toronto's Muslim community. Shaikh had frequently been seen with members of the alleged terrorist cell prior to their arrests in early June, yet he remained at liberty.

Given Shaikh's longstanding and lucrative ties to Canada's security forces and the importance the authorities have attached to this case, it is unlikely he would have acted without their approval or encouragement. Several media organizations had become aware of Shaikh's role and at least one major newspaper had reported that CSIS had infiltrated the alleged Toronto terrorist cell.

In any event, whether Shaikh came forward with his story at his own initiative or at the behest of his CSIS paymasters, the revelation that CSIS had infiltrated the purported Toronto terror plot has not caused the corporate media to become more questioning of the claims of the government, CSIS and the RCMP.

Rather Shaikh's disclosure became the occasion for a new barrage of sensationalist media reports that parroted the claims of the security intelligence establishment and their operatives. These reports celebrated the savvy intelligence work of Canada's security services, while portraying Shaikh as a virtuous Muslim-Canadian who out of loyalty to the Canadian state and at great individual risk helped prevent a major terrorist atrocity that otherwise would have been all but inevitable.

Shaikh, in keeping with the new line of the authorities—that the accused, while not professionally-trained terrorists, had evolved into a determined band of would-be killers who had the intent and means to perpetrate one or more atrocities—described them in his *Fifth Estate* interview as "fruitcakes ... with the capacity to do some real damage."

The media response to Shaikh's revelations was exemplified by a

July 15 *Globe and Mail* editorial titled “In praise of Mr. Shaikh.” The *Globe* denounced those in the Muslim community who have criticized Shaikh for his double-role as CSIS agent and advocate of an extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism and for working with a state agency that has harassed Muslims, while dismissing as “conspiracy”-mongering any suggestion he could have “lured young people in a terrorist plot.”

Needless to say, the *Globe* editorial said nothing about the large sums Shaikh has been paid and the \$300,000 more that he says CSIS owes him.

Not only does the size of the payoff Shaikh is seeking undercut his and the *Globe*’s claims that he acted out of “duty” to Canada and Islam. It strongly suggests that Shaikh was much more than a run-of-the-mill informant—that he may indeed have acted as an *agent provocateur*.

It is worth noting that Shaikh’s decision to reveal his identity was apparently made on a dime. When the *Toronto Star* first ran a story about a police operative in the Toronto terror plot, it said it could not reveal his identity due to the provisions of the Witness Protection Act. According to the *National Post*, the RCMP issued specific warnings to journalists not to publicly identify the mole, saying his name would be made public only when the accused in the Toronto terror plot come to trial.

By the next day, the tune had changed—but in such a way as to ensure the story remained within the bounds set for it by the authorities.

The extent to which the alleged terrorist plot is a fabrication of the Canadian state’s security services remains an open question. What is beyond question is that the government and its accomplices in the mass media have seized upon the arrest of the 17 supposed “homegrown” terrorists as a way of pushing Canadian politics still further to the right.

In this regard, the smashing of the supposed Toronto terror plot conforms to an international pattern. In the United States, Britain and Australia governments have used alleged terrorist conspiracies to obtain a minimal measure of public consent to anti-democratic domestic legislation and imperialist foreign policy. And in every one of these proceedings, many of which have been constructed on the flimsiest of evidence or no evidence at all, questions as to the role played by police informants and agents provocateurs have emerged.

The events of the past month and a half come at a particularly crucial juncture for the minority Conservative government of right-wing ideologue Stephen Harper. On the one hand, the government has been seeking to shift public opinion in favour of the expanded Canadian Armed Forces intervention in Afghanistan—itsself part of a broader effort to fashion a more warlike Canadian foreign policy and to acclimatize the Canadian public to the bloody consequences of such ventures.

On the other hand, this “success” for the security services coincides with increased visibility and attention to two parallel aspects of the Canadian state’s assault on democratic rights. The anti-terrorism act that was passed shortly after September 11th 2001 and which expanded the powers of the police and security forces is beginning a process of mandatory parliamentary review at the same time as the government’s longstanding but hitherto little-used practice of issuing security certificates (to detain non-citizens without charge indefinitely) is facing court challenge.

The media has been an eager partner at every step in this process. Having thrown their weight behind the Harper Conservatives during the recent election, the country’s major dailies have been quick to

amplify the barest of details of the alleged plot into lurid headlines about “The Jihadis among us” and about supposed plots to behead Members of Parliament. At no point have they subjected the threadbare claims of the police to the slightest bit of critical scrutiny (the *Toronto Star*’s Thomas Walkom representing an isolated exception).

It is in the nature of the beast that the politics of terrorism and the politics of state provocation and repression blend into one another, so that it is often difficult to determine where one begins and the other ends. Whether it consists of making demands on the government or of “shocking the population into action” the terrorist’s perspective betrays a fundamental orientation towards the existing state, rather than the working class, as the only interlocutor worthy of their attention. The confusion and horror created by terrorist acts strengthens the position of the state, which thus often has an interest in encouraging such acts.

Canada’s establishment and security forces, meanwhile, have a long history of provocation. In 1970, the federal government seized on two *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) kidnappings to impose the War Measures Act, a form of martial law, and detain without charge hundreds of trade unionists, socialists and *indépendantistes* who were in no way involved with the FLQ.

The most deadly act of terrorism in Canadian history—the Air India bombing of 1985—was carried out by a Sikh separatist group that included a CSIS mole among its inner circle. This mole disappeared only days before the bombing of an Air India flight from Canada to the UK claimed the lives of 329 people.

CSIS itself was created following a royal commission into dirty tricks and criminal wrongdoing by its predecessor, the RCMP Security Service, including the creation of phony FLQ cells. The new agency was given legal permission to do much of what had been illegal for the RCMP.

This sordid history notwithstanding, the events of the past month and a half represent a qualitative leap in the politics of the Canadian elite, who are now openly embracing militarism and social reaction in a way that was precluded in an earlier period. In order to remain competitive in the context of a renewed international struggle for markets, resources and geo-political influence, the Canadian ruling class has increasing need of diverse methods of overcoming popular resistance, with provocation and fear-mongering serving as the point of that spear.



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