

Canadian government unveils “terror plot” as it adopts draconian new law

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24 April 2013

Canadian authorities boasted Monday afternoon that, working in concert with the FBI and other US national security agencies, they had broken up a terrorist conspiracy involving an Iranian-based al-Qaeda cell. The announcement, made at a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) press conference, came just as the House of Commons was set to debate new anti-terrorism legislation that would give the state draconian new powers.

Two men, 30-year-old Chiheb Esseghaier, and 35-year-old, Raed Jaser, have since been charged with grave terrorist offences—charges that they vehemently deny. Yet the RCMP and Stephen Harper’s Conservative government have provided virtually no information about the alleged plot, beyond saying that the men carried out surveillance of Toronto’s railway network with a view to bombing or derailing a New York-bound passenger train.

The little that has been revealed leaves no doubt that the timing of the arrests was a calculated political decision, made in close consultation with the highest levels of the US government, and with the aim of stampeding the public on both sides of the border into accepting police-state measures.

At Monday’s press conference, the RCMP conceded that there had never been an imminent threat of a terrorist attack or even a definite plan for an attack, and that Esseghaier and Jaser have long been in the police’s sights.

It was subsequently revealed that the two alleged terrorist plotters have been under heavy state surveillance since last August—that is, for the past eight months—and that their alleged crimes date back to last year.

The charges presented by the Crown in court on Tuesday state that all but one of the offenses the two men allegedly committed—including conspiracy to commit murder—occurred in 2012 and most of them between April and September of last year. The lone exception is a charge

against Esseghaier of participating in a terrorist group.

Neither the police nor government have given any reason as to why, after allowing the accused to remain at large for months, they were suddenly arrested Monday afternoon and in a very high-profile manner. Esseghaier was apprehended while eating at a McDonald’s outlet in Montreal’s main train station; scores of police armed with rifles and accompanied by search-dogs descended on Jaser’s workplace in the Toronto borough of North York.

Speaking Tuesday after Jaser’s arraignment in a Toronto court, his lawyer, John Norris, drew attention to the timing of the police-government announcement that they had uncovered Canada’s first “al-Qaeda-sponsored” terror plot. Said Norris, “The timing of the arrest is a bit of a mystery and certainly I would like to hear the RCMP’s explanation for that. They have been very clear that there is no risk of public safety and it is surprising to say the least that this arrest would be made now, close on the heels of what happened in Boston and timed perfectly with what was happening in the House of Commons yesterday.”

On Friday, the Conservative government announced that it was changing the House of Commons’ agenda, scheduling third and final reading of its “Combating Terrorism Act” (Bill S-7) to begin Monday and conclude this week. Bill S-7 gives the state vast new powers. These include: the right to hold terrorism suspects for 72 hours without charge, to convene “investigative hearings” at which those believed to have information about an imminent terrorist attack are stripped of their right to remain silent, and the power to place restrictions for up to a year on the movements and rights of persons deemed by the state to be terrorist suspects but against whom they have insufficient evidence to lay charges.

The Conservative government’s decision to change the House of Commons agenda and rush through passage of its anti-terrorism legislation came the same day that US

authorities had placed Boston under “lockdown,” that is effective martial law, under the pretext of a manhunt for one 19-year-old suspect.

US authorities have been quick to trumpet the Canadian claims of a thwarted terrorist attack—claims that boost their own efforts to portray North America as under siege from terrorists and justify a vast expansion of the national-security apparatus and coercive powers of the state. The US ambassador to Canada, David Jacobson, issued a statement Monday saying the arrests of Esseghaier and Jaser “were the result of extensive cross-border cooperation” and had underscored “that we face serious and real threats.”

As for the Canadian authorities’ claims about the substance of the alleged Toronto railway terror plot, they should be treated with the utmost caution and skepticism.

In Canada, as in the US, the “war on terror” has been used by Liberal and Conservative governments alike as a pretext to justify imperialist intervention and erect the scaffolding of a police state.

In 2006, the RCMP staged the dramatic arrest of 18 people, almost all of them young people and some not even 18, whom they accused of preparing extensive terrorist attacks, including blowing up the parliament buildings. It subsequently emerged that the two most incriminating actions of the “Toronto 18” had been facilitated by police provocateurs. One police agent had provided the arms instruction at a “terrorist training camp,” while another had provided phony bomb-making ingredients. Nevertheless, eleven of the eighteen were convicted and most of these given lengthy prison terms.

Both Esseghaier and Jaser have protested their innocence.

At a court appearance in Montreal Tuesday, Esseghaier, a Tunisian-born Ph.D. student with expertise in nanotechnology, said in response to the charges, “These conclusions are being reached based on facts that are nothing but words and appearances.” Judge Pierre Labelle promptly ordered him to say no more, then shut down the hearing.

According to Jaser’s lawyer, Norris, “My client is in a state of shock and disbelief that this happening to him. He intends to defend himself vigorously.”

Norris added that, “the public should wait for the evidence, not [base its judgments on] a press conference.” He also took exception to the police’s attempt to present his client as a non-Canadian, noting that the Palestinian refugee has lived with his family in Canada for the past twenty years.

At Monday’s press conference, the RCMP asserted that Esseghaier and Jaser had acted under the “direction and guidance” of “al-Qaeda elements located in Iran.”

The RCMP said that they had no evidence of Iranian government involvement. However, in the past Washington has accused the Iranian government—notwithstanding its long history of bitter enmity with the Sunni fundamentalist al-Qaeda—of allowing al-Qaeda to use Iran as a conduit for money and operatives. Ottawa and Washington may now attempt to revive these dubious allegations and use them as part of their longstanding campaign to bully Iran and to whip up popular support for military aggression against the Iranian people.

The Harper Conservative government, which has declared itself Israel’s strongest ally and has expanded Canada’s decades’ old military-strategic alliance with Washington, broke off diplomatic relations with Teheran last summer. In justifying this action, Conservative Foreign Minister John Baird labeled Iran “the most significant threat to global peace and security in the world today.”

Iran, for its part, has angrily rejected the claims of an Iranian connection to the reputed terrorist plot in Canada. Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said Iran opposes “terrorist and violent action that would jeopardize lives of innocent people” and emphasized that al-Qaeda has “no compatibility with Iran in political and ideological fields.”

Mehmanparast also pointed to the hypocrisy and cynicism of Canada’s government which routinely attacks Iran as a supporter of terrorism, while backing the US-orchestrated campaign to overthrow the Syrian government—a campaign in which Islamacist forces, some of them openly aligned with al-Qaeda, are serving as shock troops. “The same current,” said Mehmanparast, “is killing people in Syria while enjoying Canada’s support.”

Workers and young people should oppose all attempts on the part of Canada’s elite to use the purported Toronto terror plot to attack democratic rights—beginning with Bill S-7—or to justify imperialist aggression.



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