

The Demonization of Arabs, Muslims: The Harper Government Spreads Hate in Canada While it Supports Terror Overseas

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From Ottawa and Washington to Paris, governments and the media sympathetic to those in power take advantage of attacks to drum up support for military adventures abroad. In this context, it is important to take a look back and see how Canadian troops got wrangled into Washington's ever-expanding "war on terror" in Iraq and Syria.

How Harper Leveraged the Parliament Attack to Misdemeanor Canada into Iraq

Speaking on January 22, 2015 about the multinational insurgents that he deployed the Canadian military to fight in the Middle East, [Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper confidently declared](#) to reporters in St. Catharines, Ontario, that, "If those guys [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants] fire at us, we're going to fire back and we're going to kill them."

Harper's comments immediately came under fire by political leaders, who accused the prime minister of deliberately misleading Canadians and their legislators in the wake of the attack on Parliament Hill several months earlier — an attack perpetrated by one mentally ill drug addict.

In considering the series of events, "cui bono," a Latin adage used by the ancient Romans, comes to mind. In other words, who benefits from events like the attack on Parliament Hill that took place on October 22, 2014? And more importantly, how are they framed? Empirically, an evaluation of these events should include an assessment of how they are used by those in power: Are these events exploited to justify steps that the authorities already wanted to take or were already in the process of taking? How do these events help and fit in with government policies and objectives?

Canadians Opposed Government Policies Prior to the Shootings

The political atmosphere inside Canada at the time of the attack on Parliament Hill, the home of Canada's federal bicameral legislature in Ottawa, needs to be scrutinized. It is no coincidence that during this timeframe [a report](#) by Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) showed that there was no critical debate in the US mainstream media about the escalation of the US military presence in the Middle East or the expanded US-led "war on terror" in Iraq and Syria. In Canada, however, Harper was having a hard time getting the majority of Canadians on board with a Canadian combat role in Washington's newest military adventure in the Middle East. Reflective of public opinion, the main Canadian

opposition parties — the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Liberal Party — as well as smaller opposition parties and an entire spectrum of groups ranging from Christian groups to the Canadian Peace Congress, also opposed the war that the Harper camp was unilaterally sucking Canadians into.

Although polling results appeared to be given in terms that were complementary to the Harperite plans, the polls conducted in September about Canadian involvement in Iraq were still not sympathetic to Harper and his foreign policy. Response categories were collapsed into one another and demographic gaps existed alongside manipulative wording, which contributed to skewed data.

At best, a margin of Canadians polled reported that they would support limited involvement, such as dispatching Canadian military advisors. Some [77 percent of Canadians polled](#) by Nanos Research for the pro-Harper channel CTV “agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that sending Canadian soldiers to Iraq would entangle Canada in a prolonged conflict, while only [45 percent of Canadians polled](#) by Abacus Data supported deploying Canadian forces “to combat Islamic terrorism” in the Middle East. Angus Reid, however, reported that [only 38 percent](#) of Canadians backed the idea of sending Canadian military advisors to support the US-led coalition in Iraq, and [only 28 percent](#) of Canadians said they “would support Canada getting more involved, including military intervention.”

On October 2, 2014 another pro-Harper channel, the Global Television Network, owned by the Calgary-based telecommunications company Shaw, misreported that the results of an Ipsos-Reid poll — commissioned by the channel — found that “more than two-thirds” of Canadians supported Harper’s plans to send McDonnell Douglas CF-18 Hornet warplanes. The Global Television Network report was inaccurate because the actual figure was 64 percent — a figure of at least 67 percent would be needed to claim “more than two-thirds.” More importantly, the 64 percent itself was a numerical illusion that was the result of the combination of two different response categories that said: (1) they’re “strongly” supportive of Harper’s commitment, and (2) “somewhat in support of Canada sending jets.”

During the period leading to Canada’s combat mission in Iraq, from August to September, Harper did not even want to discuss his plans. Breaching the parliamentary codes of conduct in the House of Commons, the parliament’s lower chamber, the Harperites refused to answer any inquiries from other federal legislators during question period about Harper’s military commitment to the latest US war in Iraq. In contrast, while the Conservative Party refused to tell other federal legislators in the Canadian Parliament anything about Iraq, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of defence and Manitoban MP James Bezan outlined to the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) how Harper had unilaterally established a [military timetable in Iraq](#). (Earlier last year Bezan himself had been accused of being a Russophobe and warmonger to such an extent that he was [sanctioned](#) alongside twelve other federal legislators by Russia and specifically banned from entering the Russian Federation last March for his role in stoking anti-Russian sentiment in Canada and Ukraine.)

NDP leader Thomas Mulcair started questioning the Harperites on September 23, 2014 by pointing out how their Conservative Party government had continuously refused to be transparent to the Canadian Parliament about what it was doing inside Iraq. Mulcair also cited Bezan’s comments on CPAC. Addressing House of Commons Speaker Andrew Scheer in parliamentary fashion, [Mulcair stated](#) the following:

“Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has failed to answer clear questions about his ill-defined military deployment in Iraq.

Yesterday, Conservatives refused once again to answer in this House, but the member for Selkirk-Interlake stated on CPAC that the mission will end on October 4.

Will the Conservative government confirm that the 30-day Canadian commitment in Iraq will indeed end on October 4?”

Instead of answering the questions about Iraq being asked in the House of Commons, Harper’s parliamentary secretary, MP Paul Calandra, responded by changing the subject from Iraq to Israel. Each time Harper’s government was asked for an explanation about what type of commitment the Canadian government had made to Washington in Iraq, [Calandra would respond](#) by discussing how the Harperite wing of the Conservative Party was supporting Tel Aviv and the Israeli military by saying things like, “Israel is on the front lines. Canada will continue to support our friends in Israel.”

Speaker Scheer allowed this stonewalling to continue. He even rebuked Mulcair after the NDP leader demanded that Scheer start enforcing parliamentary procedures and rules by asking Harper’s side to answer the questions being floored instead of watching idly from the Speaker’s Chair. Scheer, himself a virtual Harperite appointee and a Conservative Party MP, instead refused to let Mulcair continue with the questions about Iraq, offering a clear demonstration of how Harper has bypassed and overridden the system of checks, balances, and oversight of important Canadian public institutions.

After the October 22, 2015 attack on Parliament Hill, Harper grew more comfortable talking about his involvement in the US military campaign in Iraq and his plans to extend and expand the Canadian role in the war. He would eventually reveal that Ottawa was also going to illegally bomb Syria alongside the Pentagon. Feeling empowered enough to reveal the true extent of Canada’s military involvement in the Middle East, Harper would thus reveal his game plan and true intentions. This was similar to how US President George W. Bush used the 9/11 attacks as an opportunity to pass intrusive surveillance measures and to invade Taliban-controlled Afghanistan with little to no domestic opposition.

On the day of the Parliament Hill attack, Harper was, in fact, in the process of passing intrusive Canadian surveillance legislation that roughly corresponded to the PATRIOT Act passed by the US Congress in 2001, which went unchallenged in the United States in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Since October 22, 2014 Harper has been beefing up surveillance and security legislation even though the Canadian government’s own Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien confirmed on [October 29, 2014](#) that Canadian security and law enforcement forces already had all the tools that they need and do not need new security measures. In addition to Privacy Commissioner Therrien, UN counter-terrorism advisor Hamed El-Said has said that the Canadian laws that already exist are “more than enough to [deal with terrorism](#).”

The Construction of Different Narratives

From June to the day of the shooting on Parliament Hill, three individuals had murdered soldiers and police constables in Canada. Only two of the attacks, however, received intense national scrutiny by the Canadian federal government and mainstream media. More importantly, different standards were used to frame and explain those three attacks.

On June 14, 2014 Justin Bourque attacked five members of Canada's national police force in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Bourque's attack took place in Moncton, New Brunswick, where the RCMP is contracted as a local police force by the provincial government. Three of the RCMP constables — David Ross, Fabrice Gevaudan and James Larche — died from their gun wounds, while the other two — Eric Dubois and Marie Goguen — were hospitalized from injuries suffered from their encounter with Bourque.

The accounts of the day reveal that Bourque, who was dressed in combat apparel and armed with a rifle and a crossbow, was deliberately targeting the RCMP and did not harm civilians when they came near the scene of the crime.

Months after Bourque's rampage in New Brunswick, Martin Couture-Rouleau — who the RCMP had been watching and even visiting regularly — hit two Canadian soldiers with his car in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec, on October 20, 2014. One of the soldiers suffered minor injuries, while the other, Warrant Patrice Vincent, died as a result of the hit-and-run attack. Couture-Rouleau would himself be killed when he was gunned down by St-Jean-sur-Richelieu local police, after his car flipped over in the course of the police chase.

On the same day, citing Québecor Media's TVA channel, Allan Woods, Bruce Campion-Smith and Les Whittington reported for the *Toronto Star* that multiple local witnesses confirmed that Couture-Rouleau's hands were up in the air and that he was surrendering himself to the police when he was shot. *The Toronto Star* reported: "Witnesses who spoke with the TVA network Monday afternoon said they saw a man emerge from the flipped vehicle that was lying in a ditch on the side of the road. The man had his hands in the air and was walking toward police when at least one officer opened fire on the suspect. The witnesses said they heard up to seven gunshots."

Yet shortly after the article was posted online, the *Toronto Star* revised it, redacting that portion of the report. Only syndicated copies of the article, like those featured in the [Cambridge Times](#), carry the redacted passage.

Two days after Couture-Rouleau's hit-and-run, a solitary gunman named Michael Zehaf-Bibeau (originally Michael Joseph Hall) attacked Parliament Hill. Armed with a loaded 1894 Winchester rifle, Zehaf-Bibeau murdered Corporal Nathan Cirillo, an unarmed reservist from the city of Hamilton, and carjacked a ministerial car parked in front of Parliament Hill's East Block. He then ran into the Canadian Parliament's Centre Block, where the landmark Peace Tower stands, and was killed by armed guards and the Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons Kevin Vickers during a shootout.

By all measures the standards applied to framing these three events were wildly different and inconsistent. Although all three acts of murder were criminal acts of violence, only Bourque's attack in Moncton was framed as a domestic crime by Harper and much of the media. Almost like battles in distant lands, the attacks in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu and on Parliament Hill were presented extra-judicially as outside the usual procedures of Canadian justice and well beyond the scope of domestic criminal incidents. The crimes committed by Couture-Rouleau and Zehaf-Bibeau were framed as acts of foreign terrorism, attacks on Canada carried out by a foreign enemy.

Further, the Harperite government immediately commented on Couture-Rouleau's hit-and-run. As the Toronto-based *Globe and Mail* reported on October 20, [a statement from the Prime Minister's Office](#) said that there were "'clear indications' the suspect in this incident

‘had become radicalized.’” On the very same day, one of Harper’s own Conservative Party backbenchers in the Canadian House of Commons, Saskatchewanian MP Randy Hoback, [asked](#) Harper to comment on the “possible terror attack against two members of the Canadian Armed Forces near Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.”

Harper and his government would go on [to flimsily try to connect](#) Couture-Rouleau’s hit-and-run attack to Zehaf-Bibeau’s rampage in Ottawa as part of an orchestrated attack on Canada by the ISIL/ISIS/DAESH/IS. On November 24, the news service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported that the Privy Council Office (PCO) had issued an [internal memorandum](#) warning Canadian authorities on [October 17](#), 2014 that there could be potential “violent acts of terrorism” in Canada. This warning came days before Couture-Rouleau or Zehaf-Bibeau had committed their crimes — on October 20 and 22, respectively. While this internal memorandum has been used haphazardly to corroborate Harper’s narrative of Canada being under siege, the PCO document is by no means definitive — [it even says](#) that “there is no information indicating that an attack is imminent.”

The Demonization of Arabs and Muslims in Canada

In part, the actions of Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau have either ipso facto or subtly been presented by the Harperite camp as the threats to Canadian society and security being posed by Islam, Muslims and Arabs. In this context, the journalist [Steven Zhou pointed out](#) on December 18, 2014 that the Conservative Party “has gone after many Arab and Muslim groups that have publicly challenged the party’s hawkish foreign policy stances. These crackdowns have laid the groundwork for further repression and histrionics when the Tories need a boost in the polls.”

“In a time of austerity, Canada’s prime minister has mastered the art of xenophobic demonization,” Zhou observed. It is in this context that Harper has even openly been accused inside the House of Commons of using inflammatory language and demonization to divide Canadians for political gain. “Mr. Harper specifically singles out mosques [in the debate]. That leads to Islamophobia and that’s irresponsible,” [according to NDP leader Thomas Mulcair](#).

Muslims and Arabs have been problematized as not only a security problem, but as a socio-cultural problem in Canada.

Harper had Jason Kenny, who was his immigration minister at the time, bar any Muslim women who opted to wear niqabs, which are cloths that cover or mask the face, from being allowed to take their citizenship oaths in 2011. After four years the Canadian judicial system overturned the move by Jason Kenny and Harper as an unconstitutional act that went against religious freedom inside Canada. Harper, however, said he would refuse to accept this.

“I believe, and I think most Canadians believe, that it is offensive that someone would hide their identity at the very moment where they are committing to [join the Canadian family](#),” Harper had said when he made the announcement in Victoriaville, Québec. “This is a society that is transparent, open, and where people are equal,” he paradoxically added.

The blatant hypocrisy and twisted logic should be apparent. While the Harperites claim all Canadians are equal and free, they are saying that those women that choose to cover their faces as a part of their personal identity are unequal and that they are not acting Canadian

and must conform by abandoning the way they want to dress in their personal lives. More specifically, they are underhandedly using the debate over the niqab symbolically to target Muslims and to equate them as non-Canadians.

After Harper announced that he would work to revoke the right of Muslim women who decided to cover their faces during Canadian citizenship ceremonies and that he would challenge the Canadian court system on it, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau accused Harper's government of essentially "employing the same kind of rhetoric to raise fears against Muslims that was used to promote a 'none is too many' restrictive immigration policy toward [Jews in the 1930s and 1940s](#)." "It is a cruel joke to claim you are liberating people from oppression by dictating in law what they can and cannot wear," [Trudeau added](#).

Ignoring minority rights and constitutional freedoms, Harper tried to defend his actions by saying that it was what the majority of Canadians wanted. On March 10, 2015, in a revealing moment, Harper would rhetorically ask the House of Commons the following question: "Why would Canadians, contrary to our own values, embrace a practice at that time that is not transparent, that is not open and frankly is rooted in a culture [that is anti-women](#)?"

What Harper essentially claimed was "that religious freedoms should be overruled because almost all Canadians do not support the wearing of a niqab," as Trudeau put it while questioning Harper on the issue the next day on March 11. Ignoring the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms again, Harper would clumsily respond yet again claiming that it was what the majority of Canadians wanted. "These are not the views only of the overwhelming majority of Canadians, they are the views of the overwhelming majority of [moderate Muslims](#)," Harper responded.

www.conservative.ca/cpc/not-the-way-we-do-things-here/

NOT THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE.

In Canada, women are full and equal members of society -- including when they take the oath of Canadian citizenship.

That is why we are strongly opposed to anyone wearing a niqab – a full face covering – while taking the oath.

As PM Harper said last week, that is not the way we do things here:

"It is offensive that someone would hide their identity at the very moment where they are committing to join the Canadian family."

In Canada, women are full and equal members of society. Including when they take the oath of Canadian citizenship.

Sign if you agree:

First Name

Last Name

E-mail

Not long after Harper's government ignited the niqab controversy, one of his Conservative Party backbenchers created a scandal that critics say is part of a trend among Steven Harper and his followers. "If you're not willing to show your face in the ceremony that you're joining the best country in the world, then frankly...if you don't like that or don't want to do that, then stay the hell [where you came from](#)," Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP Larry Miller told CFOS radio on March 16, 2015.

It is because of incidents like this that Harper has been repeatedly accused of giving in to "[racist sentiments](#) within his own party" in Parliament Hill.

Liberal MP John McCallum pointed out during a session of Parliament held on March 12, 2015 that Prime Minister Harper had remained silent after New Brunswick Southwest MP John Williamson told "a conference in Ottawa that it makes no sense to pay 'whities' to stay home while companies bring in 'brown people' as temporary foreign workers."

This bigoted discourse is common among the Harperites, because it uses xenophobia to scapegoat others for the exploitation of Canadian workers that Harper's government itself is responsible for. It creates a false picture of the Conservative Party as working to protect Canadian workers and their families, when it is directly involved in their exploitation. John Williamson was either utterly ignorant or lying and engaged in polemics. Temporary foreign worker programs are programs that Harper and his corporate patrons heavily support, because foreign workers are brought in to work into Canada at low costs that are below minimum wage as cheap labour.

When it was brought up, the issue was ignored by Harper in the House of Commons. Instead of answering McCallum's question about Williamson's racist and xenophobic comment, Employment and Social Development Minister Pierre Poilievre responded by referred instead to the complaint made by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs about Justin Trudeau's comparison of Prime Minister Harper's immigration policy against Muslims being akin to Canada's anti-Jewish immigration policies of the past

Ironically, on the same day that McCallum called out Harper for his tacit approval of racist political discourse, a survey study was released by Ekos inferring that [41 percent of respondents](#) had attitudes that believed that "too many" immigrants to Canada are visible minorities. Among Harper's support base the figure was 51 percent whereas it was 35 percent and 32 percent respectively among NDP and Liberal Party supporters. When experts were asked about what the Ekos survey was inferring about growing intolerance in Canadian society, the finger was pointed at Prime Minister Harper. Professor Guida Man, a sociologist at York University, told the newspaper [Metro](#) that the xenophobic "discourse from Ottawa on subjects like wearing a niqab in citizenship ceremonies contributes to a racist view of immigration."

Individual Crimes Tacitly Portrayed as a Collective Crime

While all of the murderers — Justin Bourque, Martin Couture-Rouleau, and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau — in the three cases were French-Canadian, no correlations have been made between their French-Canadian background and their criminal actions. Nevertheless, the fact that Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau had become Muslims recently in their adult lives has been used to diagnose and partially explain their crimes.

This type of demonization is Orientalist discourse that distorts popular perceptions about

Arabs and Muslims and emphasizes or exaggerates their perceived characteristics. Orientalism is a part of a discursive process tied to policy-setting agendas that manage public perception and concepts that support modern-day empire.

To varying degrees whenever Muslim or ethnically Arab individuals commit crimes in what are considered Western societies, such as Canada or France or the United States, the assessments made have either tacitly or openly passed judgment on all Muslims or Arabs. The Arab or Muslim backgrounds of these individuals are used to explain their crimes, and this is why the crimes of Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau are not presented just as the crimes of two individuals, but as the crimes of two Muslims — their crimes are connected to their faith. The tacit or overt explanation is that their crimes were not perpetrated because they are criminals or psychologically ill, but because they are Muslims. If they were also of Arab background and not French-Canadian, their Arab background would also have been used to explain the pathology of their crimes.

To Susan Bibeau, the mother of Zehaf-Bibeau, her son was mentally ill and his actions were a form of suicide by homicide. She makes this very clear in an open letter to the RCMP, where she points out that the RCMP misrepresented her statements about her son. “I want to correct the statement of the RCMP [*sic.*] I never said he wanted to go to Syria, I specifically said Saudi Arabia. They taped my conversation so there can [be] little doubt about the accuracy of what I said. I did phone the agent to point the error, I don’t know if they corrected it,” Susan Bibeau writes. “What about Michael, if I try to understand his actions, for me he was an unhappy person at odds with the world. In his final days, [I would add mentally unbalanced](#),” she also says.

Instead of being evaluated as the crimes of individuals, the crimes of Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau were assessed in the context of their faith or perceived ethnicity. These factors have been used to justify the foreign policy of Prime Minister Harper, his semi-hushed deployment of Canadian military to Iraq, and his support for both US foreign policy and [Israel’s wars](#) in the Middle East. This is why their crimes have also been explained as acts of terrorism instead of homicides.

Bourque held deeply conservative Christian views, but this factor has been ignored and not used to explain his pathology as a murderer and as the perpetrator of violence in Moncton. Unlike Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau, Bourque — who viewed himself as [“a soldier of Jesus Christ”](#) — is not described as an “extremist,” or a “self-radicalized” individual, or a “terrorist.” In fact, Bourque’s faith is rarely — if ever — mentioned. Unlike Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau, Bourque is still alive too.

Court documents reveal that [Bourque was sleep-deprived](#) and felt “depressed about his life” in the days leading up to his rampage in New Brunswick. The documents also show that he had a strained relationship with his family while friends told Global News that he was [“sick”](#) and that “he said that he had been diagnosed with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).” *The Globe and Mail* also reported that he had used cocaine and that his parents had kicked him out of their home at the [end of 2012](#). Yet a psychiatric assessment concluded that he was not suffering from clinical depression and was thus fit to stand trial.

Meanwhile, Zehaf-Bibeau and Couture-Rouleau reportedly suffered from chronic psychological problems. On October 23, 2014 the [Montreal Gazette interviewed](#) several mental health professionals who prominently linked the men’s alleged mental health issues to their decisions to join “an extremist fringe.”

These assessments are important, because they are reflective of the false ethos that has been used to justify the militarization of Canada and its role as an accomplice of US militarism and Washington's adventurism in Iraq and Syria.

Why does it Appear that only Arab or Muslim Crimes are Considered Terrorism?

The prejudiced position of Prime Minister Harper becomes clear when his government's handling of other Canadian criminal cases are examined. Based on an individual's perspective, it can be argued that terrorism is a euphemism or dysphemism for crimes committed by individuals that are Arabs or Muslims. In either case, terrorism appears to simply be a word that is applied to the crimes of these individuals. While Couture-Rouleau and Zehaf-Bibeau were described and categorized as terrorists, Justin Bourque and other criminals in Canada were not labeled such by Harper and actually given very little attention.

One such case is that of Canadian military veteran Glen Gordon Gieschen.

Glen Gieschen was arrested in January 2013 for putting together an elaborate plan to attack the Veterans Affairs Canada office in Calgary by killing its staff and blowing up the Bantrel Building. He had felt betrayed by the Canadian government, which did not help him with his medical bills after he was discharged as an intelligence operative from the Canadian military. "His wife had contacted Okotoks RCMP in January 2014 and advised them that her husband was possibly suicidal based on a note he had written. She said he was an ex-military man and had [taken a rifle with him](#)," the *Calgary Herald* reported about the circumstances behind his arrest. The newspaper also revealed that he had "a typed building plan of the Bantrel Building on 6th Ave. S.W., building specifications on the Bantrel Building, its exits, entrances and location of offices" on his cellular phone and laptop computer that "also included surveillance videos and photographs taken by the accused of the Bantrel Building including on and around the 7th floor which contains the Veterans Affairs Canada office, and a detailed attack plan including equipment and armaments to be used, military assault apparel to be worn by him during the attack, and strategies to complete the attack [then escape the scene](#)."

Despite the elaborate nature of Gieschen's plans, which unlike the improvised attacks of Couture-Rouleau and Zehaf-Bibeau, was planning on taking out an entire office building, there was no wailing for the need for increased security measures by Steven Harper. In fact, Gieschen's name was banned [from even being publicly published until](#) 2014.

Another case is that of Christopher B. Phillips. [Police arrested Phillips](#), a US military veteran and ophthalmologist, at the Chimo Hotel in Ottawa on January 21, 2015. Phillips was arrested for threatening police with harm and possessing two caches of chemical weapons in Halifax. The chemical that Phillips possessed was osmium tetroxide, which is highly poisonous. His actions were attributed to his military injuries, chronic pain, and mood swings by [the Ottawa Citizen](#).

The caliber of the media and government attention would have been much different if Phillips were to have been an Arab or a Muslim. Because he was not an Arab or a Muslim, little media or government focus was given to the case. It did not serve the Harperite agenda.

A month after the arrest of Phillips another incident occurred in Halifax. It was revealed on [February 14, 2015](#) that an actual plot to create a mass casualty event in Halifax, Nova

Scotia was thwarted. “Two people were arrested at Halifax Stanfield International Airport and have been charged with conspiracy to commit murder after an alleged plot was foiled to kill a large number of people at the Halifax Shopping Centre in the city’s west end on Valentine’s Day,” the [CBC reported](#). Although the police said that the conspirators — Lindsay Kantha Souvannarath and Randall Steven Shepherd — “had some beliefs and were willing to carry out violent acts against citizens,” they were not referred to as terrorists by Harper.

Justice Minister Peter MacKay — the man who auctioned off the Progressive Conservative Party for personal political gain and elevation by openly lying on guarantying that he would not allow a takeover of it by Harper’s Canadian Alliance — stressed that the thwarted Halifax attack was not a planned terrorist attack. The journalist Laura Kana rightly pointed out the following: “Police said there is no evidence that ideology or culture is part of the allegations. But if plotting to cause mass murder in a public place is not called [terrorism, then what is?](#)”

What was not being told by MacKay or the mainstream media was that their “beliefs” were racist leanings and Nazi political views. Halifax Media Co-Op points this out in an article by Robert Devet:

“That at least some of the plotters were into posting Nazi paraphernalia on their facebook pages, or espousing white supremacist ideas on message boards has been downplayed by local reporters.

The Tumblr blog of James Gamble, the 19-year old found dead in Timberlea, features pictures of Adolph Hitler and marching Nazis.

You go to the Tumblr blog of Lindsay Kantha Souvannarath, the Illinois woman now in custody, and a swastika is the first thing you see.

Meanwhile, thanks to the work of people who know their way around in the world of blogs, message boards and handles, there are strong suggestions that at least Souvannarath has a long-time infatuation with fascist and white supremacist ideas. None of this has made it into Nova Scotia news outlets.

One CBC reporter looked at Gamble’s Tumblr blog, and mentions the Nazi references in passing, almost [as an afterthought](#).”

If the individuals that had planned on committing the killing spree were Muslims, another narrative would have been in play, as it was in regards to Martin Couture-Rouleau and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau. Harper and MacKay would have labeled the conspirators terrorists and talked about the need for increased security “to keep Canadians safe” and sending the Canadian military overseas to fight their ideological base.

Harper’s Labeling Politics

The politics behind Harper’s labeling practices should become clear. As well as being a tactic of division and political pandering, the discussion and framing of terrorism is taking place through the partisan lens of the Canadian government. The fear and panic being generated by it is additionally a convenient tool for Harper to distract the attention of Canadians about the decline in living standards, Canada’s economic problems, austerity, and his administration’s rampant corruption.

There is major concern of impending human rights violations inside Canada that will take place under Harper's banner of domestic security and fighting terrorism. "The government is not listening. [We need to be louder](#)," Alex Neve, the secretary-general of Amnesty International Canada, wrote on March 13, 2015 about Prime Minister Harper's plans to legislate Bill C-51 in the name of domestically fighting terrorism.

[Numerous Canadians have protested](#) against Harper's legislation calling him [the real terrorist and threat](#) to Canadian society, because of his political agenda.

Harper's opponents believe that he will abuse the label of terrorist against political opponents, could arrest innocent people merely for opposing US foreign policy, the demonization of the Russians, Canada's military involvement in the Middle East, the seizure of Aboriginal Canadian territory, or Israel's occupation of Palestine. This is why Prime Minister Harper's announcements that he plans on mandating "life without parole" sentences — meaning putting individuals in prison until death — for those convicted of high treason, murdering a peacetime or correctional officer, terrorism, kidnapping, sexual assault, and crimes "[of a particularly brutal nature](#)" was viewed very suspiciously across Canada by civil liberties organization and political activists.

Four Canadian former prime ministers have spoken out against Harper and joined eighteen other prominent Canadians "who have served as Supreme Court of Canada justices, ministers of justice and of public safety, solicitors-general, members of the Security and Intelligence Review Committee and commissioners [responsible for overseeing the RCMP](#)" in writing an open letter on February 19, 2015. The group of ex-prime ministers — the Conservative Joseph Clark and the Liberals John Turner, Jean Chrétien, and Paul Martin — warned about the "serious problems for public safety and for [human rights](#)" that Harper's agenda poses.

Harper himself has said that anyone who appears to have been "radicalized" will be arrested [regardless of their age](#). This means that [political sympathies](#) for Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Kurdistan Workers Party, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or, maybe even, the separatist forces in East Ukraine (Novorossiya) have the potential of being used to categorize someone as "self-radicalized" and to imprison them.

How Harper Spreads Hate at Home While Expanding Wars Abroad

Adding fuel to the fire, the six-minute video of a Canadian member of the ISIL was conveniently highlighted by the partisan Harper-supporting *National Post* in its "Israel and the Middle East" section on [December 8, 2014](#). After the *National Post* reported that the ISIL/ISIS/DAESH/IS member John Maguire, who called himself Abu Anwar Al-Canadi in the video, said that Canadians deserved to be attacked, it cited Maguire as saying that the slapdash attacks by Couture-Rouleau and Zehaf-Bibeau in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Ottawa were direct results of the Canadian military fighting in Iraq. Although Maguire's claims were out of line with the facts, the *National Post* report was meant to further support the stance of Prime Minister Harper in the eyes of Canadians.

Canada is involved in mission creep in the Middle East. Despite the fact that it promised Canadians that there would be no ground combat involving Canadian troops under a "non-combat" mandate, Harper's government began tacitly admit that Canadian soldiers were actually involved in ground combat in Iraq without using the word combat by the end of January-[2015](#). It would phrase it by saying that "mission had evolved."

Towing the Harper government's line, General Tom Lawson — the commander of the Canadian Armed Forces — told MPs that Canadian soldiers were directing airstrikes from the ground inside Iraq, but were still operating within their non-combat mandate on January 29, 2015. General Lawson said that he “had not anticipated” that Canadian forces would be in a position to safely direct airstrikes inside Iraq when he had ruled it out in October 2014.

About one month after General Lawson spoke to Canadian MPs, on March 7, it was announced Sergeant Andrew Joseph Doiron, from the Canadian Special Operations Regiment in Petawawa, was killed during the fighting in Iraq. Ottawa attributed it to friendly fire, but up until that point Canadian soldiers had already gotten into at least three battles.

Even though Harper has claimed that Canada will [not be attacking Syria](#), which international law repudiates, he has navigated Canada into joining Washington's illegal airstrikes in Syria. This is the same prime minister whose ministers and government have continuously stated that they are willing to join any wars against Syria. Although it has always tried to give its statements about attacking Syria a veneer of legitimacy in the past by saying that Canada would go to war if the UN authorized it, that is out the door now. The ISIS/ISIL/DAESH/IS is being used by Ottawa as a justification and means to ignore the UN Charter and international law by throwing them out the window.

Why was Zehaf-Bibeau's October 2014 Message Released in March 2015?

In close conjunction with the timing of Sergeant Doiron's death, the RCMP finally released an RCMP-edited video that was a shortened version of the original one that Zehaf-Bibeau had made on his cell phone. RCMP Commissioner Robert Paulson would give the following explanation to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for why the video was withheld from the public on March 6:

“I first learned about the video when I was briefed on its discovery during the forensic examination of the cellphone seized from the suspect's vehicle. It was the Sunday following the attack. I directed that a press release be issued that day. My thinking was that announcing the existence of the video would — while we were examining and assessing it — insure against any subsequent criticism that we were concealing the existence of this evidence.

What followed were dynamic discussions within the RCMP about the evidentiary value and the operational utility of the video. We had also to carefully consider what impact its public release could have — not only on this investigation — but what impact [it might have on others.](#)”

In the video Zehaf-Bibeau says that his actions are “retaliation for Afghanistan and for what Harper wants to do in Iraq.” Chances are had the video been released there would have been greater opposition to Harper's Iraq war campaign and that is why the video was withheld. If the video was released in 2014, it probably would have had a negative on Harper's plans to deploy the Canadian military to the Middle East.

Harper's Dirty Hands: Harper in Bed with the ISIL?

Harper's rush to ensnare Canada in the wars in Iraq and Syria should come as no surprise. As the leader of the Canadian Alliance — the successor of the Reform Party — Harper pushed for Canada to help the US and Britain illegally invade Iraq in 2003. He even read the exact same speech that Australian Prime Minister John Howard had read to the Australian

Parliament. Although the Conservative Party staffer Owen Lippert resigned for [plagiarism in 2008](#), there was and still is suspicion that the speech was forwarded from Washington to both Harper and John Howard.

Regardless of whether Harper's 2003 speech was really a script from Washington or a case of plagiarism, what should not be lost is that Harper was aligned to the neo-conservative camp in the Washington Beltway that has called for perpetual imperial wars. (It is in the same tradition of his alignment with the neo-cons that Harper has sided with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the US Republicans against US President Barack Obama. This could be why Obama exercised his presidential veto against the Keystone XL Pipeline and justified it by explaining that the way they "get oil out in Canada is an extraordinarily dirty way of extracting oil," which would create tensions between Harper and his supporters in the Canadian oil industry.)

While the Harperites demonize Arabs and Muslims, in one way or another, at home in Canada, they have also been accused of supporting the head chopping ISIS/ISIL/DAESH/IS in Iraq and Syria. Charges and reports have been made that Prime Minister Harper's government has been recruiting for the same terrorist organization that it has told Canadians it is fighting in the Middle East. *The Ottawa Citizen* had this to say about it: "Canada's embassy in Jordan, which is run by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's handpicked ambassador and former top bodyguard, is being linked in news reports to an unfolding [international terrorism and spy scandal.](#)"

Reuters has also confirmed the Harper government's role in recruiting for the same terrorists it claims to be fighting alongside the US, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. "A European security source familiar with the case of the three girls said the person in question had a connection with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) spy agency," *Reuters* reported on March 12, 2015.

Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney has refused to comment on the reports that Canada is recruiting for ISIS/ISIL/DAESH/IS, saying it was an [issue of operational security](#) whereas [Ray Boisvert](#), a former Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) director, said that the story is plausible. This is while Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said that the situation is very complicated, but that the ISIS/ISIL/DAESH/IS [recruiter is a Syrian national working for one of the countries inside Washington's coalition](#) fighting the ISIS/ISIL/DAESH/IS. Although the man — reported to be called Mohammed Al-Rashed — is not a Canadian citizen, he had Canadian government-issued equipment and was known to have visited the Canadian Embassy in Amman frequently.

Balanced skepticism of those in power is never a bad thing. It has to be emphasized that if anything is to be learned from all these events, it is that the most vital action to watch and critically analyze is the reaction of a government and the authorities to events like the attack on Parliament Hill, the Martin Place hostage crisis in Sydney, and the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris. What do they have to gain?

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