

## Who's the popinjay? Barring British MP Galloway puts Canada in a shameful light

By [Eric Walberg](#)

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Who ever thought that Canadian politics could be so interesting? First there was the attempted coup last December, when the fractious opposition Liberals, socialists and separatists stunned the nation and joined together, almost ousting the ruling Conservatives. Now the intrepid British MP George Galloway, fresh from bringing the walls of Gaza tumbling down, is launching a land invasion of Canada from the US in a replay of the war of 1812.

The world was shocked — or rather embarrassed — this week when Canadian Immigration and Citizenship Minister Jason Kenney announced he was banning Galloway from entering Canada, as a “security risk”. Well, sort of. Kenney’s Director of Communications Alykhan Velshi explained that it was really the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Kenney merely chose not to overturn their decision, taken, no doubt, after long and costly sleuthing by Canada’s ace security forces. No official reason was given.

Is Galloway planning to enter Canada as part of some top-secret global terrorist operation? The more likely explanation is because of his outspoken and eloquent opposition to the war in Afghanistan and his success in breaking the siege of Gaza with the historic Viva Palestina convoy last week. He is being accused of supporting Hamas, which Canada officially considers a terrorist organisation. However, his only weapon is his fiery oratory, a fine example of — to paraphrase the old saw — words are mightier than white phosphorus bombs.

The Conservative government is on shaky ground these days. It is only because the opposition is split almost equally three ways that the united right can pretend to govern. Conservative strategists obviously feel that Galloway is not an issue that the opposition will rally around. After all, the new Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff supported the war in Iraq and the Liberal government under prime minister Jean Cretien provided troops for Afghanistan as early as 2002. The socialists and separatists are not happy with the war but are afraid to say so too openly, considering who controls the media and hence politicians’ fate in any elections.

Galloway’s host Toronto Coalition to Stop the War coordinator James Clark said: “We will not accept this ban, and we plan on challenging it.” Galloway stated that the government’s action merely proves that “unjust wars abroad will end up consuming the very liberties that make us who we are.” The obvious violation of Canada’s traditional tolerance and freedom of speech is in fact a windfall for the peaceniks.

Plans are going ahead for the speaking tour which will start 30 March in Toronto, after which it goes on to Mississauga (home of many Afghan refugees), Montreal and Ottawa.

Organisers are encouraging the public to continue buying tickets to show their support for free speech. "One way or another, we will bring George Galloway to Canada," vowed Laith Marouf, coordinator of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights. "We're currently planning a delegation of MPs, lawyers and activists to escort Mr Galloway from the US across the Canadian border."

Like last week's attack on Chas Freeman in the US, this attempt to disrupt the support for the beleaguered Palestinians is backfiring. After a campaign by the Israeli lobby that Freeman said plumbs "the depths of dishonour and indecency", he was forced to withdraw as Obama's nominee for chairman of his National Intelligence Council, causing a furor which still resonates. The Galloway ban is giving much greater exposure to Canadians of his withering critique of Canada's failed war: "Flagwaving, or in the case of Canada, shroud-waving of the brave Canadian soldiers who gave their lives for this failed policy of the Canadian government [in Afghanistan] is despicable beyond words."

The decision to deny Galloway entry stands in stark contrast to the warm welcome the Conservative government and the Canadian media gave former US president George W Bush last week. Only a hardy band of 500 protesters braved the Calgary cold to throw shoes as close as possible to a man who many believe should not have been granted entry for his role in perpetuating crimes against humanity.

How unfortunate for Harper that this clumsy *faux pas* merely makes him and Canada look foolish around the world. Just about the only praise for Harper comes from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations, which represents all 50 of the Israeli lobby groups in the US, and is arguably even more powerful than AIPAC. They honoured Harper and the entire Conservative government last year by awarding them their very first International Leadership Award for his support of Israel.

The Galloway gaffe is not all the Conservatives have been up to. Immigration Minister Kenney just announced he was cutting funding for social programmes provided by the Canadian Arab Federation for new Muslim immigrants (including many Afghans) because it openly criticises the current government's strongly pro-Israel stance in the Middle East.

Kenney has also been busy deporting another five US war resisters, including Kimberly Rivera, the first US woman Iraq war resister to go to Canada. Rivera, her husband and three children, including her six-week-old daughter, were forced to leave before parliament reconvened last month, when an angry opposition, smelling blood, could have overturned the heartless ruling. Kenney is on record saying the refugee claims of war resisters are "bogus", that he "has no sympathy for them." This is the same Canada that was a haven for 125,000 US Vietnam war resisters in the 1960-70s, the largest migration from the US to Canada since the American Revolution.

Curiously, Kenney's 24-year-old yes-man, Alykhan Velshi, is a self-styled "moderate Muslim" who described Galloway as an "infamous street-corner Cromwell". "We're not going to seek to overturn that [CBSA] assessment in order to let into the country someone who ... is, in a sense, a popinjay for those Taliban fighters who are trying to kill Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan."

Though denying the charge that he financially supports Hamas, Galloway is otherwise treating the matter tongue-in-cheek. In a press release, he pointed out: "In 2006 [Kenney]

addressed a rally of the so called People's Mujahideen of Iran, a Waco-style cult, banned in the European Union as a terrorist organisation... Being banned by such a man is like being lectured on due diligence by Lord Conrad Black, a Kenney ally, now breaking stones in the hot sun."

Concerning his views of the Taliban, as a young Labour backbencher he told prime minister Margaret Thatcher that she "had opened the gates to the barbarians" and that "a long, dark night would now descend upon the people of Afghanistan ." He calls the current policy "equally a profound mistake ... worse than a crime, as Talleyrand said, it's a blunder."

The irony of refusing to allow Galloway to come to Canada after he managed to break the two-year siege of Gaza by the Israelis was apparently lost on Kenney and Velshi. Galloway has spoken in Canada before about the Middle East without setting off any alarm bells.

Galloway recalled another such attempt to prevent free speech across the US-Canada border, when "Paul Robeson was forbidden to enter Canada not by Ottawa but by Washington, which had taken away his passport. But he was still able to transfix a vast crowd of Vancouver's mill hands and miners with a 17-minute telephone concert culminating in a rendition of the Ballad of Joe Hill. Technology has moved on since then. And so from coast to coast, Minister Kenney notwithstanding, I will be heard one way or another."

*Eric Walberg writes for Al-Ahram Weekly. You can reach him at [www.geocities.com/walberg2002/](http://www.geocities.com/walberg2002/)*

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### **About the author:**

Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the

Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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