

Human Rights: Canada in the dock

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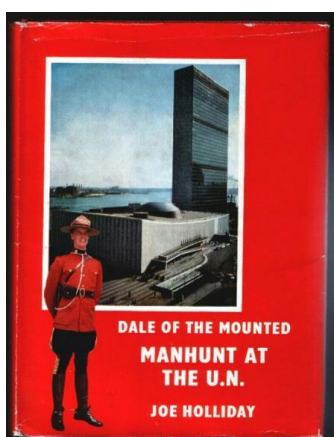
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The world is taking note of the ruling Conservatives' shameful betrayal of Canada's once admirable reputation as a fair country, sincerely working on the world stage to improve the lot of the disadvantaged and suffering. In the UN Human Rights Council's Universal *Periodic Review*, Canada was criticized to such an extent that the Council decided to send the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and representatives of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to investigate.

Minister of Foreign Affairs spokesman Joseph Lavoie dismissed complaints by

- China of "widespread racial discrimination",
- Iran of "child sexual exploitation and trafficking, the right to food, discriminatory law and regulation against indigenous people and minority groups including Muslim, Arab and African communities",
- Pakistan of "increased poverty and unemployment rate among immigrant communities",
- Egypt of "racial profiling in law-enforcement action", and
- Cuba of "racism and xenophobia" in Canada,

insisting that "Canada has a track record of being a human rights leader, at home and around the world."



The visits come at an awkward moment for the Conservatives, as it makes a public display of victimizing Muslims as part of a campaign to ram through the "Combating Terrorism Act" (Bill S-7), which gives the state extraordinary powers to detain suspects without any charges and without any legal protections for up to a year.

This sorry state of Canadian political life is the fruit of the Conservatives' slavish obedience

to every US whim, and of its decision to abandon any pretense of an independent foreign policy, making all decisions in consultation with Israeli advisers under the public security cooperation “partnership” signed in 2008 by Canada and Israel to “protect their respective countries’ population, assets and interests from common threats”. Israel security agents now officially assist Canada’s security services, the RCMP and CSIS, in profiling Canadians citizens who are Muslims and monitoring individuals and/or organizations in Canada involved in supporting the rights of Palestinians and other such nefarious activities. Even the usually timid UN is appalled.

The past two weeks of public spectacle could be lifted from a perverse Alice-in-Wonderland scenario. The latest claim to have uncovered a dastardly scheme by Muslim furriners plotting to explode weapons of mass destruction came just a week after the now legendary Boston bombing. Both incidents were dramatically unfolded to a gullible public as classic ‘good vs evil’, though neither holds water.

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 an RCMP press conference, came out of the blue, just days after the Boston bombing, and a few days after the House of Commons agenda was changed to debate final reading of the draconian anti-terrorism legislation.

On cue, US ambassador to Canada David Jacobson hailed the action as “the result of extensive cross-border cooperation” showing “that we face serious and real threats.” The men were arrested in a Hollywoodesque fashion—Chiheb Esseghaier while eating at McDonald’s in Montreal’s main train station; Raed Jaser, by scores of police armed with rifles and accompanied by search-dogs at his workplace in the Toronto borough of North York. They were charged with conspiracy to bomb a New York-bound Via passenger train, though the RCMP conceded that there had never been an imminent threat of an attack or even a definite plan, that Esseghaier and Jaser have been under police radar since last August (based on a year-old tip from an imam), and that their alleged crimes date back to last year.

The reason for their delayed and then sudden arrest is beyond a doubt the notorious Bill S-7, a bill that was forced on Canada by Big Brother in post-911 2001, and which was not renewed in 2007 thanks to Liberal opposition (they originally passed it and then had enough sense to oppose it). The Conservative government suddenly changed the House of Commons agenda as US authorities placed Boston under martial law. The Canadian copycat arrests clearly are intended to add a Canadian pretext for proceeding with Bill S-7, while showing that “We are all Americans now.”

This episode calls to mind the terrorist scare in 2006, when the RCMP staged the dramatic arrest of 18 young Muslims, whom they accused of preparing extensive terrorist attacks, including blowing up the parliament buildings. During the trial, it emerged that the “Toronto 18” was riddled with police agents, one providing the arms instruction at a “terrorist training camp” while another providing harmless bomb-making ingredients. Nevertheless, eleven were convicted and most given lengthy prison terms.

When Esseghaier, a Tunisian-born Montreal PhD student in nanotechnology, told the judge, “These conclusions are being reached based on facts that are nothing but words and appearances,” he was told to shut up, and the hearing was shut down. Jaser’s lawyer John

Norris said his client was “in a state of shock and disbelief” and “intends to defend himself vigorously”. Norris 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.

Is it just possible that UN Human Rights Council members read the ‘news’, are appalled, and are genuinely concerned about what’s happening to human rights in Canada?

Canadians’ plight is bad enough, but this recent orchestration of Islamophobia has another angle, just as appalling. The RCMP assertion that these damn furriners acted under the “direction and guidance” of “al-Qaeda elements located in Iran” is a blatant falsehood, as Iran (like Iraq before the US invasion) is probably the most anti-al-Qaeda country in the world. The fundamentalist Sunni al-Qaeda delights in killing Shia, was (and is?) supported by the US and financed by Canada’s enlightened Saudi oil-millionaire allies. So it’s not just a question of stripping Canadians of their rights, but of adding toxic fuel to the US-Israeli fires intended to launch war against peaceful (pro-Palestinian) Iran.

The RCMP admitted that they had no evidence of Iranian government involvement, but still ... (nudge, nudge, wink, wink). When Canada broke off diplomatic relations with Teheran last autumn, Foreign Minister John Baird labeled Iran “the most significant threat to global peace and security in the world today”. All Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast had to do was to point to the hypocrisy and cynicism of Canada’s government backing the campaign to overthrow the Syrian government—a campaign in which some of insurgents are openly aligned with al-Qaeda: “The same [al-Qaeda] current is killing people in Syria while enjoying Canada’s support.”

And what about the latest hit on the American 911 funny bone? Tamerlan Tsarnaev was under surveillance for four years by the FBI, who were asked by the Russian government to arrest him in 2010 (which they did not do). They do admit to interviewing him in 2011 and sifting through his computer files, but, remarkably for someone allegedly radicalized by the internet, they found nothing of concern. It’s not clear why Russia let him go to visit his parents in the center of terrorism (Dagestan) in Russia in 2012, where purportedly he received some form of terror training or further Islamist indoctrination. Nor how he managed to attend a workshop next door in hostile Georgia organized by the “Fund of the Caucasus” (which works with the US rightwing thinktank the Jamestown Foundation) focused on destabilizing the Caucasus region.

Were both the FBI and the Russian FSB asleep? Was Tamerlan an FBI operative? Was he set up to do the bombing, or did he go AWOL on the FBI? Is this Chechen connection intended to frighten Russia into acquiescing to US-Israeli plans for Syria? “This [official] scenario is simply impossible in the real world,” writes former UK ambassador Craig Murray. In an interview with *Russian Today*, Tamerlan’s mother said, ““They were set up, the FBI followed them for years.” Is this international intrigue—intended to scare both Russia and Iran into abandoning the beleaguered Syrian government—really what Canadian domestic human rights and foreign policy should be based on? Why should we trust Ambassador Jacobson’s blah-blah about “serious threats”?

Canadians are left with security forces eager to show they are doing something, a craven government intent on passing a draconian bill to take away freedoms, and a foreign policy based on a US-Israel obsession with finding some spark to ignite the latest war craze—attack Iran. The supposed pretext—Iran’s nuclear energy program—is after all

wearing a tad thin. Peter Osborne in the *Telegraph* explained how the West has turned down one serious offer after another by Iran (two in 2005 alone), and argues that it is western rather than Iranian intransigence that prevents a deal being struck today. So if no one believes the cry of “Wolf!” on that boondoggle, then the next best thing is “al-Qaeda”. Hell, Bush got away with it against Iraq in 2003; maybe it will work again.

Iran poses only an ideological threat—telling the truth to the US-Israeli tyrant and inspiring Arab Springs. Concludes Osborne, “The US and its European clients are driven by a different compulsion: the humiliation and eventual destruction of Iran’s Islamic regime.”

As for being killed by a *bona fide* terrorist, the odds are 1 in 20 million, while every year, 4,600 Americans are killed in workplace-related accidents, and more than 30,000 are killed by gun violence. Every 28 hours a black person is killed by police, security guards or vigilantes. On Boston Marathon Day, six Pakistanis died in a drone strike, while scores were killed in car bombs in Iraq. I won’t even begin to recount the daily horrors inflicted by the US in Afghanistan.

Not that these latter crimes against humanity—committed by us—justify retributive violence in any religion, especially Islam. “You shall not be treacherous, you shall not deceive, you shall not mutilate, you shall not kill children.” But the fact that we in the West are unconcerned with preventing senseless deaths at home, and are unaware or don’t care about the murders committed daily in our name abroad, does not bode well for the future. Only when we stop perpetrating violence will violence against us end.

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