

Instead of Muzzling Canadians at Home, Prime Minister Harper Should Stop Canada's Support of Terrorism Abroad

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Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper is trying to convince Canadians that he is against terrorism while his national spy agency, CSIS, is engaged in supporting terrorism abroad. Moreover, Harper now claims he cannot fight terrorism at home unless Bill C-51, legislation that gives sweeping new powers to police and CSIS, is passed.

As for CSIS' support of terrorism abroad, some Canadian media have recently reported what watchful Arab media have known for at least the past four years.

"Turkish authorities say they have detained a spy for helping three British girls join Islamic State, and reports say the detainee worked for Canada's spy agency (CSIS)," reported the Toronto Sun.

Shamima Begum, 15, Amira Abase, 15, and Kadiza Sultana, 16 – all considered minors in Western nations – easily crossed into Syria from Turkey after leaving Britain in February without parental permission or knowledge. It is not known if they were planning to fight as military volunteers, or had signed up to be "brides of ISIS."

The Sun report added that the Turkish Office of Public Diplomacy also released a statement on the matter, saying the capture of the intelligence officer showcased a "complex problem involving intelligence wars."

The Turkish statement continued:

"This incident should be a message to those always blaming Turkey ... on the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, and shows it is a problem more complicated than a mere border security issue... Turkey will continue its call for stronger intelligence sharing, and is worried about the lack of intelligence sharing in a matter involving the lives of three young girls."

Meanwhile, in Canada more than 100 of law professors have signed an open letter warning the Prime Minister that the sweeping new anti-terror law being introduced by his Conservative majority government is a "dangerous piece of legislation" that undermines human rights and democracy itself.

This open letter follows an earlier plea to scrap Bill C-51, signed by four former Canadian prime ministers, five former Supreme Court justices and several cabinet ministers.

“Protecting human rights and protecting public safety are complementary objectives, but experience has shown that serious human rights abuses can occur in the name of maintaining national security,”

the former PMs, ministers and Supreme Court jurists wrote.

“Given the secrecy around national security activities, abuses can go undetected and without remedy. This results not only in devastating personal consequences for the individuals, but a profoundly negative impact on Canada’s reputation as a rights-respecting nation.”

In their letter of more than 4,000 words, covering “some (and only some)” of the terror bill’s alleged defects, the law professors wrote:

“It is sadly ironic that democratic debate is being curtailed on a bill that vastly expands the scope of covert state activity when that activity will be subject to poor or even non-existent democratic oversight or review.”

They also warn that C-51 would not only do little to fight terrorism; it could actually set back the cause. “In this respect,” they wrote,

“we wish it to be clear that we are neither ‘extremists’ (as the Prime Minister has recently labelled the Official Opposition for its resistance to Bill C-51), nor dismissive of the real threats to Canadians’ security that government and Parliament have a duty to protect.

“Rather, we believe that terrorism must be countered in ways that are fully consistent with core values (that include liberty, non-discrimination, and the rule of law), that are evidence-based, and that are likely to be effective.”

Growing resistance to C-51 has eclipsed the popular approval that first greeted it when the Harper government introduced it in January, accompanied by a vow of revenge against “violent jihadists” who “want to harm us because they hate our society and the values it represents.”

But critics now claim that C-51 opens the way for the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) to target legitimate dissent, making criminals out of environmentalists, aboriginal groups, and other civilian protesters hostile to specific government policies.

C-51 was widely seen as boosting the Conservative cause in French-speaking Quebec, however, where its proposed measures have proven especially popular.

Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party agreed to support the bill, but are pressing for amendments to increase civilian oversight of the soon-to-be unfettered spies.

Thomas Mulcair, leader of the Official Opposition and New Democratic Party (also a former Quebec cabinet minister), opposed the bill outright.

While Mulcair’s stance is steadily gathering more ground, he should also challenge Stephen Harper on whether CSIS was and still is engaged in supporting terrorism abroad while

Canadians' freedoms are about to be curtailed at home.

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