

The Toronto 18 Frame-Up: Fraud and Fear-Mongering in the 'War on Terror'

The theatrical arrests of 18 (mostly young) Muslims in Toronto in the Summer of 2006 reinforced media-driven paranoia that homegrown terrorists were everywhere. The unraveling of the case two years later exposes to view yet again the sinister and disgraceful behavior of Canada's security intelligence apparatus, which has formed a habit of confecting false accusations of terrorism against Canadian citizens. "The threat to Canadian society is not a bunch of Muslim boys playing paintball, it's an ideologically driven government willing to curtail our civil liberties."

BY MICHAEL KEEFER

On June 2, 2006 the arrests of seventeen Muslim men and youths in Toronto on terrorism charges made headlines around the world. The accusations against them were indeed spectacular: according to the Toronto police, this terrorist cell had been planning bombing attacks against the Houses of Parliament, the CN Tower, the headquarters of CSIS (the Canadian Security Intelligence Service) and the CBC – and also, most sensationally, they had allegedly intended, after storming the Parliament buildings, to behead Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

And yet any careful reader of the news stories which followed these arrests (and a fortnight later, that of an eighteenth suspect) could not help but be struck by a number of anomalies. The case was represented as a major triumph of police and intelligence work, and the dangers involved were underlined by massive paramilitary theatrics at the arraignment hearings in the Toronto suburb of Brampton, including grim-faced snipers on rooftops, and helicopters thumping overhead.

But how were we to interpret these theatrics? Did Canadian intelligence agencies really anticipate that squads of heavily armed terrorists might descend on the Brampton courthouse in a desperate Robin-Hood style attempt to free their captured comrades? Or would it be cynical to think that the state was trying to panic the Canadian media and the public at large with this graphic demonstration of how terrified we should all be – if not of the handcuffed prisoners, then certainly of hypothetical shadowy accomplices who remained at liberty? The logic is clear: if the brave and clever men who dress like ninjas, carry big automatic weapons and work in intelligence are worried, then the rest of us ought to be gob-smacked with fear.

This message appears to have got through quite widely – not least to an American versifier on the Buzzflash website who proposed ironically that his compatriots should stop worrying about building a fence along their southern border to stop Mexican immigration, given what seemed more urgent problems to the north:

*Putting up a Mexican fence
May not be the best defense.
Let's build one near Toronto
And get it finished pronto.¹*

No-one, presumably, had told him about the existence of Lake Ontario.

Snipers and helicopters notwithstanding, there turned out to be a bizarre disjunction between the material resources the arrested group (if it was a group) possessed, and what the Toronto police and RCMP claimed were their goals. For the arsenal of weaponry revealed by the arresting officers was distinctly unimpressive. In addition to five pairs of boots, it consisted of “six flashlights, one walkie-talkie, one voltmeter, eight D-cell batteries, a cell phone, a circuit board, a computer hard drive, one barbecue grill, a set of barbecue tongs, a wooden door with 21 bullet marks and a 9 mm hand gun.”²

Oh yes – and centrally displayed, a bag of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, as evidence that the group had intended to emulate Timothy McVeigh's purported feat of destroying the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City with an ammonium nitrate fuel oil (ANFO) truck bomb.³ Not that any of the accused had actually been in possession of that or any other bag of ammonium nitrate fertilizer – much less fuel oil, or an appropriately configured truck in which to mix the two, or a detonating device – in the absence of which ammonium nitrate makes plants grow, but won't blow anything up, not even the headquarters of CSIS. Yet one or possibly more of the accused had apparently been lured by a police agent into making a purchase order of a large quantity of ammonium nitrate, and had accepted delivery of some quantity of a harmless substitute chemical, at which point the police swooped.

Most media outlets found nothing worthy of comment either in the extreme sketchiness of the accused terrorists' equipment or in the evident fact that the government's case against them rested on entrapment. Not merely had the idea of obtaining ammonium nitrate apparently been suggested to one or more members of the group by a police mole (who conveniently was also an agricultural engineer by profession, and thus able to place an order for a significant quantity of

the substance), but the only weapon the group was accused of possessing, a 9 mm pistol, turns out to have been the property of another police mole – who seems also to have been responsible for organizing camping and paint-balling excursions into the Ontario countryside that he subsequently represented as having been terrorist training camps.

The knowledge of military tactics or even of simple camping that he imparted would seem to have been of dubious value: much of the group's time during their major winter 'training camp' in December 2005 appears to have been spent huddling in a local Tim Horton's donut shop trying to stay warm. Of parallel significance is the information, based on surveillance of the group, that police released to the media: it indicates that one or more of them didn't know who the current Canadian prime minister is, much less where to find him. There seems to be no sign, moreover, that any of the accused had thought about how much damage an ANFO truck bomb might be able to inflict upon the massive reinforced concrete footings of the CN Tower. (The short answer is: none whatsoever.)

But however unimpressive much of the evidence made public by state authorities might appear to be, its narrative framing was very effective indeed.

The motif of decapitation was headlined in many accounts of the arrests.⁴ Although one might think that the manner in which this motif was deployed ought to have prompted a pause for critical reflection, the general media response was wholly uncritical.

The thought of decapitation by Islamist terrorists evokes the most lurid misdeed of the arch-terrorist Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi – who for several years (until, that is, a narrative of his extinction became more useful to American authorities than stories of how he ran the Iraqi resistance more or less single-handedly on behalf of al Qaeda) was represented by the Pentagon's fabulists as a demonic Scarlet Pimpernel: that "demmed elusive" one-legged Jordanian was here, there, and everywhere, demonstrating a truly devilish capacity to carry out near-simultaneous operations in far-distant places, and committing crimes that there is good reason to suspect may in fact have been perpetrated by American special forces.⁵

In the spring of 2004, a fortnight after revelations about the torture and murder of Iraqi prisoners by their American interrogators at Abu Graib were headlined throughout the American and world media, Zarqawi very conveniently videotaped himself beheading an American captive, Nicholas Berg. It would be an understatement to call this videotape problematic. Berg, who had been arrested by American forces, was acknowledged as having been in their custody shortly before his death; in the videotape he is wearing American orange prison overalls, while a plastic chair in the background

closely resembles chairs that appear in Abu Graib torture photographs. Cries of anguish were dubbed onto the tape, but Berg was clearly already dead when he was beheaded.⁶ Zarqawi, his executioner, whom the CIA described as having an artificial leg, is vigorously bipedal, and speaks Arabic without his known Jordanian accent. In brief, the video appears to be a black operations product, and Berg a victim of the same people who ordered the Abu Graib atrocities.

The reason for the Zarqawi video's manufacture seems obvious. It abruptly reversed the valences of news stories

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about torture and executions, making an American the hapless victim and a brutal Islamist terrorist the perpetrator. And it allowed media pundits to argue that, whatever the lapses of a few 'bad apples' on their side, their adversaries were wholly barbaric.

Meanwhile, damning evidence of the direct responsibility of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and other senior officials for systematic torture and murder in the American gulag could be flushed down the memory hole.

In the case of the Toronto 18, the beheading motif strengthened associations with al Qaeda and international terrorism by linking the accused with Zarqawi – even though, behind the headlines, it appeared that beheading Stephen Harper was not a crime any of them had actually proposed to carry out, but rather something an imaginative police officer had speculated in a synopsis of accusations one of them would be likely to want to do.⁷ In the event, "no criminal charges to this effect were ever actually laid"⁸ – though Mubin Shaikh, one of the two police moles, helped keep the beheading motif in circulation when he told PBS Frontline that the plans of the accused included "[s]torming Parliament, kidnapping, like holding hostage the MPs, beheading them one by one, unless Canadian troops are pulled out of Afghanistan and Muslim prisoners are released from prisons in Canada."⁹

The outlines of an interpretive framework – or what I would prefer to call, with full awareness of the ambiguity, a framing narrative – were thus in place. Like Timothy McVeigh, whose method of attacks they are accused of wanting to imitate, the Toronto 18 are constructed for us as "home-grown terrorists"; but the association with Zarqawi's most sensational supposed crime makes them at the same time barbarous outsiders, with spiritual loyalties to the largely mythical Islamist terrorist international¹⁰ for which his name is a metonymy. The links to both key aspects of this framework, we can observe, are provided by the police: the first through entrapment, and the second through mere supposition.

Only some time after the arrests did the elaborateness of the entrapment scheme become apparent. Early reports made much of an alleged "training camp" session the group conducted in Washago, Ontario in December 2005 – the principal organizer of which turned out to have been Mubin

Shaikh, who was paid \$77,000 by the RCMP for his services in setting the group up for arrest, and who, when he went public on July 13th to speak of his role to the media, declared that he was owed a further \$300,000.¹¹ As an army cadet from the age of 13 to 19 with the Canadian Armed Forces, Shaikh received some weapons training and would have learned the rudiments of infantry tactics. Although a publication ban on evidence in this case prevents us from knowing in any detail what kinds of paramilitary expertise the group is accused of having possessed, he was presumably its principal source.

In October 2006, details were revealed of the role played by a second mole, an agricultural engineer, in what CBC News called “a sophisticated sting operation.” His function was to provide “evidence to the authorities that the conspirators had material that they thought could be used to make bombs,” and unnamed sources informed CBC News that his degree in agricultural engineering “could have given the alleged conspirators access to much larger quantities of ammonium nitrate than they could have purchased at ordinary retail outlets.”¹²

In February 2007, it emerged that the RCMP had paid this second mole fully \$4.1 million for his services. The Mounties helpfully provided *Maclean’s magazine* with a set of “secret” memos in order to make clear what their thinking had been. These memos showed, according to *Maclean’s*, that by mid-April 2006 “authorities had grown increasingly desperate, convinced that the group was on the brink of building a bomb.” If the RCMP truly believed this, then their ensuing behavior is so bizarre as to defy explanation. One might suppose that if they had information from Mubin Shaikh that the group he had ‘infiltrated’ (to give as polite as possible a spin to his activities) was nearly capable of making bombing attacks, had formulated a plan “of renting three 14-foot U-Haul vans packed with explosives, parking them at strategic locations, and remotely triggering the explosives,” and had actually got so far as setting a date for the attack,¹³ then the Mounties ought reasonably to think about making some arrests.

Instead of doing so, the RCMP made contact on April 29, 2006 with a CSIS informant – a Canadian-born man from “a prominent Egyptian family” who had received most of his secondary and university education in Cairo, returning to Canada in 2000 “with degrees in agriculture and business.” This high-minded citizen initially requested \$15 million as compensation for infiltrating the alleged terrorist group and offering them his expertise, but was bargained down to \$4.1 million; by mid-May, the RCMP had given him “the legal authority to ‘knowingly facilitate a terrorist activity’ in the name of cracking the case.” His job, according to the *Maclean’s* report, “was to provide suspects with credit cards and help them purchase large quantities of what they believed to be ammonium nitrate, the same chemical used in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.”¹⁴ In other words, his job was to make possible a purchase that the supposed terrorists would not otherwise have had the resources for – and might indeed not even have contemplated without his intervention.

Let’s see what the evidence – at least what we’ve been allowed to know of it – adds up to. One of the accused is alleged by Mubin Shaikh to have experimented with a home-made detonator¹⁵; the same man is also said to have had contacts with Islamist radicals from the US. Apart from this alleged detonator, the only item more dangerous than barbecue tongs that the group possessed or had access to was Mubin Shaikh’s own 9 mm pistol.

And what of the purported group’s alleged bomb-making expertise? One might well suspect that the RCMP was if anything concerned by their lack of any such expertise, and did not themselves believe Shaikh’s story that the group was “on the brink” of being able to carry out terrorist bombing attacks. Why else would the Mounties spend \$4.1 million to hire an agricultural engineer, already tested as a CSIS informant, who could tell some witless member or members of the group how to make an ANFO truck bomb, enable a purchase of ammonium nitrate through his professional accreditation, give them credit cards so they could actually put a purchase order through – and also, it turns out, provide them with warehouse space for storage of the substance, in a building conveniently located a hundred yards from the RCMP’s Newmarket headquarters?¹⁶

At its senior levels, the RCMP is both a scandalously corrupt and a scandalously politicized organization. (Evidence of corruption can be found in the recent disgraceful rip-off by senior officers of the RCMP’s own pension fund.¹⁷ The force’s politicization was made apparent in its unprecedented intervention in the 2006 federal election campaign: midway through the campaign, the RCMP launched a corruption investigation into the office of Liberal Finance Minister Ralph Goodale, hitherto a highly respected politician.¹⁸ Goodale and his staff were exonerated in February 2007, but in the mean time the empty investigation had fueled opposition parties’ accusations of government corruption and tipped the election into the hands of Stephen Harper’s Conservatives.)

One may then suspect that the RCMP’s ‘desperation’ in mid-April 2006 had less to do with apprehension of an actual terrorist threat than it did with senior officers’ awareness that while Mubin Shaikh was shepherding his group toward arrest, the evidence he had been able to produce amounted to little more than gossip and idle chatter of the kind that had first attracted CSIS agents to the internet chat-room postings of Fahim Ahmad and Zakaria Amara, who became labeled as leaders of the terror plot.¹⁹ The Canadian Supreme Court was scheduled to hear a case “involving how evidence was heard in anti-terrorism cases” in the second week of June 2006: is it altogether a coincidence that the high-priced and urgent labours of the second mole made it possible for the RCMP to make a mass terrorism arrest a week before this hearing?²⁰

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Perhaps we should take a closer look at these two police moles. What, first, could have induced the parents of Toronto area youths – who in some cases were only fifteen at the time

of their arrest – to permit them to take part in camping and paint-balling events organized by Mubin Shaikh?

By the time Shaikh took up employment as an RCMP mole, he had become a figure of some prominence in Toronto's Muslim community. He was active in 2005 in campaigning for legitimation by the Ontario government of sharia family adjudication courts – to the point that some members of the Muslim community urged him to desist. More important, one might guess, was his work at the Masjid El Noor mosque as a “conflict resolution specialist,” and his service under Liberal MP Alan Tonks as Multiculturalism Chair of the York South-Weston Federal Liberal Association. The riding association's website notes his training in “Alternate Dispute Resolution through the Faculty of Law, University of Windsor,” his interest in comparative religious studies, and his response to “the conflicts that rage in our world” – which was to dedicate himself “to inter-faith harmony and mutual respect for human rights as the only way forward towards peace and stability in our society.” The website also mentions his involvement throughout his teen years in the Canadian Army Cadets, where he rose to be Warrant Officer, Drill Sergeant Major, and Staff Instructor,²¹ and would thus have had substantial experience in supervising activities of a quasi-military nature for younger teen-age boys.

This seems, in short, the kind of young man that parents would have no qualms about their teenage sons associating with—though the two first sentences of the web-page's description of him might, in retrospect, prompt rueful reflection: “Traveller, philosopher, theologian, Mubin Shaikh is not your ordinary Torontonians. At first look, one might think they've encountered an extremist but on second take, you realize you've been had!”²²

Shaikh appears to have encouraged his young associates to make precisely this mistake – and for reasons that may have been less pure than the respect for Islamic law and love for his country that he represented to the media as his motives. The Liberal Party website neglects to mention that his past history includes a significant involvement with hard drugs, though as Shaikh acknowledged to *Maclean's Magazine* in September 2007, he has in the very recent past been a serious cocaine addict. By his own account, as transmitted by the *Maclean's* journalist, Shaikh was in his younger days “a partier, a pot-smoking tough guy who liked to drop LSD,” but he “quit cold turkey and rededicated himself to Islam” after high school. In 2006, however, “the burden of being Canada's most famous mole became too much to bear. And when it did, he turned not to God, but to hard drugs”:

“I spent some money on it, money that I shouldn't have spent,” he admits. “The stress of my involvement was so great. Nobody has been through the situation that I have been

through, and because of its impact and importance and significance – that is one hell of a weight to realize is on your head. It got so bad for me, it just broke me. It just broke me.”²³

Shaikh claimed that as a result of the stress he faced after publicly revealing himself as a mole in the Toronto 18 arrests, “I got back into my old friends, and I started doing s--t again.”²⁴

Several aspects of this story, as passed on by *Maclean's*, raise interesting questions. First, quitting drug use “cold turkey” after high school is suggestive, not of marijuana and LSD use, but of addiction to an opiate like cocaine or heroin. In drug argot, “doing shit” normally refers to these latter drugs, so when Shaikh explains his cocaine addiction as resulting from renewed contact with “old friends” who facilitated his “doing shit again,” he appears to be confessing to a return to an earlier cocaine addiction.²⁵

One might well doubt the reliability of Shaikh's indications of time. He told the *Maclean's* journalist, presumably in early September 2007, that he hadn't touched cocaine “for a few months.” But Shaikh also told *Maclean's* that: *he bought “a couple thousand dollars” worth of cocaine over a six-month span, and before long, a few casual snorts had ballooned into a full-blown habit. “There were a couple of times when I got real scared because my heart rate started blasting up and I had to call an ambulance,” he says. “I started realizing: ‘Oh my God, what have I gotten myself into?’” He finally phoned his RCMP handlers and told them the truth. They checked him into rehab.*²⁶

Because addicts are notoriously unreliable about details relating to their illness, the defendants' lawyers will no doubt want to know when Mubin Shaikh had to call ambulances, and when he was checked into rehab. Was he telling the *Maclean's* journalist that his cocaine use lasted just six months (in which case there's a minor contradiction between saying he used cocaine from mid-July 2006 until mid-February 2007, and saying in early September 2007 that he'd been clean “for a few months”: nearly seven months is more than “a few”)? Or was he saying that he became a serious addict only in February 2007 and last used cocaine in about June of that year? In either case, can his claim that renewed addiction was caused only by the stresses of July 2006 be credited?

Shaikh is insistent that his history of drug use in no way invalidates his reliability as a witness: “They are going to say: ‘You did drugs.’ Okay, fine, I did drugs after the investigation. How does that affect at all what happened during the investigation? Zero.”²⁷ During his late teens, however, Shaikh appears to have been heavily involved at the same time with drugs and with his army cadet service: it might be an exaggeration to say that the two were intrinsically linked for him, but they were

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certainly concurrent interests. It seems possible that his return to army-cadet-type activities in the course of his work as a mole may have been as responsible as any stresses resulting from that work for prompting his renewed addiction to cocaine.

Shaikh’s drug addiction raises two further questions. First, although by his own account he himself initiated contacts with the police, it invites speculation as to whether his prior and possibly continuing involvement with drugs made him vulnerable to police manipulation. And secondly, as Edward Sapiano, one of the defence attorneys, has stated, “It provides extreme motivation for him to fabricate. A cocaine addict, what does he need? Cocaine. What does he need for cocaine? Money. What’s this guy getting from the police? Money. Based on what? The quality and the size of his information.”²⁸

Even the most hostile of interpreters might be willing to acknowledge that Mubin Shaikh’s behaviour has been marked by some flickers of integrity: he has, for example, maintained that two of the adult suspects, Jahmaal James and Steven Chand, ought to be set free.²⁹ (Small recompense, one might say, for the long months of imprisonment, much of it in psychologically damaging solitary confinement, that they and the other suspects have endured, not to mention their financial losses and loss of reputation.)

But the other mole appears to be, more simply, a scoundrel. This informant, whose identity is known to *Maclean’s Magazine* and the *Globe and Mail* (but not published, since he is in a witness protection program), worked for Air Canada as a flight attendant for two years following his return to this country in 2000. He then launched a catering business, which failed. According to the *Globe and Mail*, “Records show his parents filed bankruptcy papers in 2003, declaring \$4,000 in assets and \$26,000 in liabilities. The son, who looked to have run up his parents’ bills, tried to sweet-talk creditors into letting the family pay back something less than 100 cents on every dollar. The application was denied.”³⁰

He then sought to launch an import-export business, but his partner in the plan “pulled out, citing his young partner’s tendency to embellish. ‘For example, if you’d ask him how things were going [financially], he’d say they were great, but you could see a few days later that he was short of money,’ the former business partner said.”³¹ The informant did manage to start up two other businesses, one aimed at “help[ing] new immigrants adjust to life in Canada,” and the other a travel agency, which the RCMP, perhaps seeking to justify the very substantial payment it made to him for “loss of business,” described as “‘expanding’ and showing ‘signs of future success.’”³²

One may be permitted to doubt this assessment, given the accounts by the mole’s own friends of his impracticality and extravagance. “He taught me so much,” one of them enthused. “He would go ahead with an idea that wouldn’t work just to show you that it wouldn’t work.”³³ And his fondness for lavish expenditures may have worked to the detriment of his travel agency’s cash flow. According to the *Globe and Mail*, “a couple of days after Christmas in 2005 ... the infor-

mant was trying to describe to a friend one of his favorite restaurants in the world. Realizing he couldn’t do it justice with words, he decided – on the spot – to take his friend there.” On the next day, he and his friend flew to South America, ate at the special restaurant “twice in one day,” and had what the friend described as “an amazing time.”³⁴ *Maclean’s Magazine* offers a parallel anecdote of the informant’s love of “the good life”: “Hotel suites. Tennis games. Fine dining. He and his friend once flew to Poland – for the day – just to eat duck. ‘You don’t understand how much he loves food,’ says the friend, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. ‘If you tell him there is good food in Fiji, he’ll go.’”³⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, “By the time the RCMP came asking for help, the man was more than \$188,000 in debt, including a whopping \$20,000 worth of unpaid credit card bills.”³⁶

The government’s case rests, then, upon the efforts and the testimony of two men, one of them a drug addict whose attempt to cure himself by recourse to religious fundamentalism has not been conspicuously successful, and the other a wastrel with what one of his own business associates identified as a tendency to embellish. Without the work of Mubin Shaikh, it’s arguable that nothing that could plausibly be identified as a “Toronto 18” group would have existed; and it seems clear that only the entrepreneurial intervention of the second mole made it possible to claim that members of the group were seriously planning acts of terrorism.

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Most journalists who covered the Toronto 18 story in its early phases found nothing out of the ordinary in the fact that after their arrests the men and youths were subjected to sleep-deprivation torture – confined in brightly illuminated isolation cells and woken every half-hour by authorities obviously desperate for evidence.³⁷ Nor were they able to remember that three years previously another large group of Toronto Muslims had been arrested on suspicion of plotting similarly lurid acts of terrorism, which had turned out to be no more than products of the active imaginations of RCMP and CSIS agents, Toronto police detectives, and Immigration Canada officials. In that case, an investigation called Project Thread (and re-named “Project Threadbare” by skeptics) led to twenty-four men being arrested as members of an al Qaeda sleeper cell with plans to destroy the CN Tower, blow up the Pickering nuclear power plant, and set off a radioactive dirty bomb. The allegations were eventually dropped, and no charges were laid. And yet the men were held in maximum security detention for months, no statements of exoneration were issued, and seventeen of them were deported, in a manner marked by flagrant illegalities, to countries where the mere suspicion of terrorist affiliations could have very dangerous consequences.³⁸

The prosecution case against the Toronto 18 appears to be collapsing in a parallel manner. In September 2007, having already stayed charges against three of the four juveniles charged in the case, the Crown abruptly halted the preliminary hearing midway through Mubin Shaikh’s testimony (before he

could be cross-examined), and announced that the case would proceed directly to trial. As Thomas Walkom wrote, defence lawyers were furious: “The whole reason for a preliminary hearing is to determine whether there is enough evidence to warrant trial and, more important, to give the defence a chance to hear the Crown’s case. Defence lawyers say they made concessions in return for the right to cross-examine witnesses like Shaikh. Now they won’t have a chance to test his widely publicized allegations until the trial.”³⁹

In another equally remarkable development in mid-April 2008, the Crown stayed charges against four of the adult suspects, thus acknowledging that it had no case against them (while still making them sign peace bonds with rigorous curfew and bail conditions). One of the four, Qayyum Abdul Jamal, who was 43 at the time of the arrests, had been represented in court documents as the ringleader of the terrorist group. The proceedings against him turn out to be what he thought they were at the moment of his arrest – “a terrible mistake.”⁴⁰

It appears we’re now dealing with the Toronto 11 – or rather, if we remember Mubin Shaikh’s insistence that another two of the accused, Jahmaal James and Steven Chand, are innocent, with what will soon be the Toronto 9. Eight men and a boy, then, were planning to blow up and storm all those buildings, and behead all those politicians.

Andrew Mitrovica has commented in the *Toronto Star* that “The case is imploding.” He writes with due scorn of academic “security experts,” one of whom had told CBC Radio “that the police had necessarily cast their net wide and had likely ensnared a few blameless individuals along the way”:

That the police and spies have retreated into silence while these so-called experts do their bidding publicly is not particularly surprising. But their silence and the evaporating charges are instructive for a number of important reasons.

It says much about the sorry state of Canada’s security intelligence infrastructure and the sometimes incestuous relationship between that powerful and largely anonymous apparatus and some compliant members of the media who regurgitated the state-cleansed allegations and effectively branded these men terrorists.

*It also speaks to the need for Ottawa to finally dispense with the tired rhetoric that these security agencies are doing a fine job, and acknowledge the fact that our intelligence service, CSIS, and the RCMP have a long and disagreeable record of falsely accusing citizens of being terrorists.*⁴¹

There is good reason then to suspect that the charges against the Toronto 18 are wholly fraudulent – that if even one or two of them are “terrorists,” they belong to that category in much the same sense as do the Pakistani-American father and son in Lodi, California who, after being set up by a lavishly

paid agent provocateur, were talked by FBI interrogators into confessing that they had attended an al Qaeda camp in Pakistan (or perhaps Afghanistan or Kashmir) which they located variously on a mountaintop and in an underground chamber where a thousand jihadis from around the world practised pole-vaulting.⁴² Or perhaps one or two of them might be compared to the dreaded “Miami Seven,” members of an oddly un-secretive “Sons of David” cult who are accused of having conspired with al Qaeda to conduct terror attacks “even bigger than September 11” against targets like Chicago’s Sears

Tower: the men, who had no visible means of carrying out such attacks, actually committed nothing worse than the thought-crime of swearing allegiance to al Qaeda – an oath that was administered by their FBI agent provocateur.⁴³

One begins to notice how regularly these much-hyped ter-

ror threats dissolve into mist and confusion. The vaunted “UK poison cell” whose members planned to murder thousands of Londoners with ricin turned out not to be a terrorist conspiracy at all.⁴⁴ The “red mercury plot” ended with another embarrassing but largely unpublicized acquittal: the ‘terrorists’, as John Lettice writes, “had been accused of an imaginary plot to produce an imaginary radioactive ‘dirty’ bomb using an imaginary substance.”⁴⁵ The deployment of 250 London policemen to shut down an equally imaginary chemical bomb factory in Forest Gate resulted only in the near-murder of a man who, though otherwise innocent, was indeed both Muslim and bearded.⁴⁶ No less asinine was the huge international stir in August 2006 over a purported “liquid bomb plot”: most of the alleged plane bombers possessed no passports and only one had an airline ticket, and the bombs that someone in Pakistan had been tortured into saying they planned to make in aircraft toilets are a technical absurdity.⁴⁷

Even in cases where larger-scale terrorist atrocities have been perpetrated, there are serious doubts about the official accounts of what occurred. Set aside 9/11, which a massive body of evidence shows to have been the work of the Bush regime. Lockerbie, Madrid, Bali, London: in each case the official story of who perpetrated the crime is demonstrably a propaganda construct, and in each case there are lines of evidence which point to the conclusion that these were acts of state terrorism.

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The spectre of Islamist terrorism so successfully invoked by governments and the corporate media in the English-speaking world is perhaps especially alarming because of the spatio-temporal dislocations it implies. People who typically feel no distinct connection with or responsibility for conflicts in faraway places – even those stirred up or initiated by their own governments – find the more or less tranquil continuity of their lives threatened by the possibility that their familiar civic landscapes could be suddenly transformed into scenes

of ruin and carnage. This experiential dislocation, involving a fear that safely distant horrors might unpredictably translate themselves into one’s own most intimate space, is compounded by the thought that the appalling transposition would be carried out by people who are our fellow-citizens – but also, in secret, deadly enemies.

What the venomously dehistoricized ideology of the “war on terror” suggests is that religious and ethnic otherness must be, in the special case of Muslims, an ineradicable stain: immigrants of this kind, even if they have appeared, while retaining marks of otherness in their cultural and religious practices, to have attained complete social integration in the host country, are fatally susceptible to reversions into the radical otherness of their distant ancestral homelands – which are understood as places marked, in George W. Bush’s memorable inanity, by a perverse inclination to “hate us for our freedoms.”

In the immediate wake of the arrests of June 2, 2006, Stephen Harper echoed this Bushian fatuity, declaring that “As at other times in our history, we are a target, because of who we are and how we live, our society, our diversity and our values – values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.”⁴⁸

The reality is of course quite different. The fraudulent and spurious ‘war on terror’, which is in actuality a war of terror, has led, as R. T. Naylor wrote in a book published in 2006, “to a set of legal atrocities in which the main evidence against the accused consists of media gossip, claims by ‘national security experts’ with ethnopolitical axes to grind, and fables spun by informants bribed or coerced into testifying.”⁴⁹ Naylor might have been predicting the Toronto 18 case.

James Clark responds directly to Harper’s empty rhetoric in an acerbic comment on the staying of charges in mid-April:

How ironic that the values our political leaders claim they are protecting in supporting the prosecution of these men are the very same rights that have been sacrificed in the process. The men who have just been released – and effectively found innocent – have lost nearly two years of their lives and will likely suffer for years to come as they struggle to fully clear their names.

*But that doesn’t seem to matter to the Crown, whose supporters justify these tactics by evoking images of 9/11. The threat to Canadian society is not a bunch of Muslim boys playing paintball; it’s an ideologically driven government willing to curtail our civil liberties.*⁵⁰

Perhaps it’s time to turn a critical eye on the fear-mongers who have tried to separate us from such foundational principles of democratic jurisprudence as the presumption of innocence, the right of the accused to be fully informed of the charges and the evidence being used to support those charges, the right to cross-examine the accusers in open court, and finally, the obligation of the state to make known evidence in its possession that exonerates the accused.

And while we’re at it, shall we also stop subsidizing

Mubin Shaikh’s drug dealers and the gluttonous fantasies of his fellow mole? I can think of better uses for my tax dollars.

It seems more and more obvious, as the prosecution case unravels, that the “Toronto 18” case has been a propaganda operation concocted to shore up the fraudulent post-9/11 psyop of the ‘war on terror.’ The complete collapse of the case will provide Canadians with an opportunity for reining in the political elites of all the major parties who have consented to Canadian participation in that fraud, both in Afghanistan and at home.

Footnotes:

1. Tony Peyser, “17 Canadian Terror Suspects Arrested,” Buzzflash.com (5 June 2006), <http://www.buzzflash.com/peyser/0606/pey06156.html>.
2. Marjaleena Repo, “Canada: A Galloping Police State?” Centre for Research on Globalization (19 June 2006), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=REP20060619&articleid=2668>.
3. The terrorist atrocity of April 1995 for which McVeigh was convicted and executed killed 169 people, 19 of them children. In May 1995, retired Brigadier General Benton K. Partin, a USAF explosives expert, distributed to members of Congress a report, “Bomb Damage Analysis of Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building,” in which he concluded that McVeigh’s truck bomb could have inflicted only superficial damage on the building, whose partial collapse was caused rather by “explosives carefully placed at four critical junctures on supporting columns within the building.” There is other evidence that the attack involved state operatives and state foreknowledge: see *David Hoffmann, The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Politics of Terror* (Venice, California: Feral House, 1998). Hoffmann reprints Partin’s report at pp. 461-74; the text is also widely available on the internet.
4. See for example “Canada man ‘planned to behead PM,’” BBC News (7 June 2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/5054198.stm>.
5. For an illuminating analysis of the Zarqawi phenomenon, see Michel Chossudovsky, *America’s ‘War on Terrorism’* (Pincourt, Québec: Global Research, 2005), pp. 171-97; and his articles “Who is behind ‘Al Qaeda in Iraq’? Pentagon acknowledges fabricating a ‘Zarqawi Legend,’” Centre for Research on Globalization (18 April 2006), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=CHO20060418&articleid=2275>; and “Who was Abu Musab al Zarqawi?” Centre for Research on Globalization (8 June 2006), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=CHO20060608&articleid=2604>.
6. Accounts of this disgusting snuff video agree that there was no spray of blood when the unfortunate Berg was decapitated. (Viewers of Kurosawa’s classic film *Ran* may remember the beheading near the end of that film, which is marked by a spray of blood upon the wall – thus shockingly imitating the natural effect of blood pressure in a living body. Those who have seen the wretched recent Hollywood extravaganza 300 may remember, as a counter-example, the beheading by a Persian horseman of one of the leather-jock-strap-clad Spartans – whose headless corpse, in what one might read as a perverse homage to the Zarqawi video, emits not a drop of blood before toppling.)
7. See John Chuckman, “Terror in Toronto or Tempest in a Teapot: Canada’s Chatroom Jihadis,” Counterpunch (10-11 June 2006), <http://www.counterpunch.org/chuckman06102006.html>; and Bruce Champion-Smith and Michelle Shephard, “Plan to ‘behead’ PM: Brampton court hears of plot to storm Parliament Hill and take politicians hostage,” *The Toronto Star* (7 June 2006), available at http://www.yayacanada.com/toronto_torstar_chand_military.html. (The Yayacanada.com website lists parallels to the Toronto 18 entrapment: see “The Toronto ‘Terrorist’ Arrests: A rundown of related news reports,” http://www.yayacanada.com/toronto_terrorist_arrests_03-06-06.html.)
8. Omar el Akkad and Colin Freeze, “Online leaks get around publication ban: Case against 17 terrorism suspects becomes inadvertently public,” *The Globe and Mail* (2 June 2007): A17.
9. “Canada: The Cell Next Door,” reported by Linden McIntyre, PBS *Frontline* (July 2006), http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/about/episodes/602_transcript.html. There appears to be some confusion in news reports as to which parliament was to be stormed. According to

- Jackie Bannion, "The Radical Informant," *PBS Frontline* (July 2006), <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/canada602/shaikh.html>, Shaikh indicated that "the group talked about storming the provincial parliament in Toronto, holding MPs [or rather, MPPs, members of the provincial parliament] hostage, then beheading them one by one." Provincial MPPs, of course, have no say in matters of foreign policy like Canada's involvement in the occupation of Afghanistan.
10. The distinguished Canadian economist R. T. Naylor writes in *Satanic Purses: Money, Myth, and Misinformation in the War on Terror* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), p. 8, that "the al-Qa'idah legend must be one of the most useful political fantasies in history—since it has so little concrete substance, it can be (and has been) transmogrified and transplanted more or less at will to support agendas (many of them ugly) in virtually any and all corners of the world."
 11. See Michelle Shephard, "Informer wanted to protect Canada," *The Toronto Star* (14 July 2006), http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&call_pageid=971358637177&c=Article&cid=1152827412841; and Sonya Fateh, Greg McArthur, and Scott Roberts, "The Making of a Terror Mole," *The Globe and Mail* (14 July 2006), A1; available online at "The Infamous Mubin Shaikh Revealed as Mole in Terrorism Plot," SAFspace (14 July 2006), <http://www.safiyah.ca/wordpress/?p=275>.
 12. "2nd mole played key role in bomb plot probe," CBC News (13 October 2006), <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/10/13/second-person.html>.
 13. Michael Friscolanti, "The four-million dollar rat: A star Muslim informant who helped bring down the Toronto Eighteen," *Maclean's Magazine* (7 February 2007), http://www.macleans.ca/article.jsp?content=20070212_140696_140696&source=srch.
 14. Friscolanti, "The four-million dollar rat."
 15. See Jackie Bannion, "The Radical Informant."
 16. See David Weingarten, *Unfair Dealing*; this video about the Toronto 18 case is available at <http://youtube.com/user/UnfairDealing>.
 17. See Kady O'Malley and Chris Selby, "RCMP scandal deepens: Officers allege highest levels of force involved in coverup of pension fraud," *Maclean's* (29 March 2007), http://www.macleans.ca/canada/national/article.jsp?content=20070329_091523_3204; and David Hutton, "RCMP Pension Scandal: How to Stop the Rot," *The Hill Times* (30 April 2007), available online at Fair: Federal Accountability Initiative for Reform, http://fairwhistleblower.ca/news/articles/2007-04-30_rcmp_pension_scandal_how_to_stop_the_rot.html.
 18. See Jack Aubry, "RCMP had 'negative' impact on Liberal campaign," *National Post* (31 March 2008), <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=412828>; Richard Brennan, "Greens seek probe into RCMP action," *Toronto Star* (11 April 2008), <http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/413524>; and Guy Charron, "Canada: Report whitewashes federal police's intervention," World Socialist Web Site (22 May 2008), <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/may2008/rcmpm22.shtml>.
 19. See Omar el Akkad and Greg McArthur, "A grand existence among Muslims on-line: Behind the Toronto terror case," *The Globe and Mail* (19 August 2006), A4-A5.
 20. "Canada Muslims condemn alleged bomb plot," CNN.com (5 June 2006), <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/americas/06/04/canada.terror/>. This article quotes defence attorney Rocco Galati, who after noting the timing of the arrests is quoted as suggesting that "these men are being rounded up as part of a political move to affect the [Supreme Court] judges."
 21. See "Multiculturalism Chair," York South-Weston Federal Liberal Riding Association (2008), <http://yorksouth-weston.raon.ca/liberal/federal/multicultural.html>. The information on this web page has remained substantially unchanged since the spring of 2006.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. Michael Friscolanti, "The Informant, Mubin Shaikh: The Mounties' man in the Toronto terror bust admits a cocaine habit," *Maclean's* (10 September 2007), http://www.macleans.ca/canada/features/article.jsp?content=20070910_109132_109132.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. According to Jackie Bannion, "The Radical Informant," Shaikh told CBC reporter Linden McIntyre "that he took all kinds of drugs" in high school.
 26. *Ibid.* 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Quoted by Michael Friscolanti, "The Informant, Mubin Shaikh."
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. Omar el Akkad and Colin Freeze, "Police had second mole in terror plot: Informant expected to be key witness," *The Globe and Mail* (14 October 2006), A1, A4; quoted from p. A4.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Michael Friscolanti, "The four-million dollar rat."
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Omar el Akkad and Colin Freeze, "Police had a second mole," A4.
 35. Friscolanti, "The four-million dollar rat."
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. Repo, "Canada: A Galloping Police State?"
 38. See "Project Threadbare: One Year Anniversary of PreDawn Raid," Upping the Anti (6 August 2004), http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/794; and also the Threadbare website at <http://www.projectthreadbare.tyo.ca/>.
 39. Thomas Walkom, "Terror trial proceedings troubling," *Toronto Star* (25 September 2007), <http://www.thestar.com/printArticle/260191>.
 40. "Former bomb plot suspect thought arrest was a terrible mistake," CBC News (16 April 2008), <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/04/16/jamal-invu.html>.
 41. Andrew Mitrovica, "Homegrown intelligence gap," *Toronto Star* (17 April 2008), <http://www.thestar.com/article/415289>.
 42. Alexander Cockburn, "The War on Terror on the Lodi Front," *Counterpunch* (1 May 2006), <http://www.counterpunch.org/cockburn05012006.html>. See also Veena Dubai and Sunaina Maira, "'Witch-hunt' in Lodi, California," Not In Our Name (23 June 2005), <http://www.notinourname.net/detentions/lo-di-23jun05.htm>.
 43. One of the men also took a photograph of the Miami FBI headquarters – using a camera supplied to him by the FBI agent. See Bill van Auken, "Miami 'terror' arrests – a government provocation," World Socialist Web Site (24 June 2006), <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/jun2006/miam-j24.shtml>; and Tony Karon, "The Miami Seven: How Serious Was the Threat?" *TIME* (23 June 2006), <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1207412,00.html>.
 44. See George Smith, Ph.D., "UK Terror Trial Finds no Terror," National Security Notes: Global Security.org (11 April 2005), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/nsn/nsn-050411.htm>.
 45. John Lettice, "Amazing terror weapons: the imaginary suitcase nuke," *The Register* (31 July 2006), http://www.theregister.com/2006/07/31/red_mercury_trial.
 46. John Lettice, "Homebrew chemical terror bombs, hype or horror?" *The Register* (4 June 2006), http://www.theregister.com/2006/06/04/chemical_bioterror_analysis/; and "Drowning in data – complexity's threat to terror investigations," *The Register* (6 July 2006), http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/07/06/_90_days_terror_law_analysis/.
 47. Thomas C. Greene, "Mass murder in the skies: Was the plot feasible?" *The Register* (17 August 2006), http://www.theregister.com/2006/08/17/flying_toilet_terror_labs/; Craig Murray, "The UK Terror Plot: What's Really Going On?" *Counterpunch* (17 August 2006), <http://www.counterpunch.org/murray08172006.html>; James Petras, "The Liquid Bomb Hoax: The Larger Implications," Centre for Research on Globalization (25 August 2006), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=PET20060825&articleid=3069>.
 48. "Canada Muslims condemn alleged bomb plot," CNN.com (5 June 2006).
 49. Naylor, *Satanic Purses*, p. 11.
 50. James Clark, "Canadians should be very afraid," Letter to *Toronto Star* (17 April 2008), <http://www.thestar.com/printArticle/415280>.
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