

# Opinion: Federal anti-radicalization efforts have taken too narrow an approach

Yes, it's important to strengthen security agencies, but by treating only the endgame, law enforcement chases the horse long after the barn door has been torn off its hinges.

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Justice Minister Peter MacKay (left), Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Minister Steven Blaney, CSIS director Michel Coulombe and RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson arrive at the Commons public safety committee hearing witnesses on Bill C-51, Anti-terrorism Act on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Tuesday March 10, 2015. *ADRIAN WYLD / THE CANADIAN PRESS*

Day after day, we read or hear about radicalized youth adopting extremist ideology. Events have abundantly proved that our country is not immune to the contagion. The attacks that killed two Canadian soldiers last year made plain our vulnerability.

Those terrorist acts also showed we've been relatively lucky, because neither of the attackers had prepared the means to inflict mass casualties. In that regard, they stood in contrast to the inept would-be bombers of a Via Rail bridge, and the fumbling young Muslim converts in Victoria who dreamed of exploding pressure-cookers on the grounds of the B.C. legislature. If either of those terrorist dreams had come true, Canada would have suffered its own 9/11.

Why, then, has the prevention of radicalization not commanded considerably more discussion at the highest level of our public discourse?

Montreal's centre for the prevention of violent extremism, to open in September, represents an excellent local initiative and points the way for further action. Meanwhile, however, most of the anti-radicalization attention at the federal level, and virtually all the budgeted resources, are instead being spent on law enforcement.

Strengthening security agencies in the wake of terrorism has traditionally been the reaction of politicians. Such a policy can easily be understood, and no one can dispute its necessity. However, by treating only the endgame, law enforcement chases the horse long after the barn door has been torn off its hinges.

I have served for three decades on the board of InfoCult in Montreal. Since its inception, InfoCult has sought to understand the dynamics behind the radicalized mind. The organization's strategy has been to understand the psychological trajectory of the "true believer," and promote prevention through intervention.

Events are clearly proving that what we need in Canada are substantial resources that target the basis of the extremist appeal. The fight against radicalization requires, on the one hand, a major effort to identify why receptive people are succumbing to the extremist message and, on the other, a focus on working with the families of those people.

Family members are the ones most likely to notice risk situations. As recent events in Quebec prove, a significant part of prevention can come from

tipoffs called in by parents and siblings. Not all families, however, are willing to alert the police. We should therefore make it easy for them to communicate with agencies that are not connected to law enforcement.

The Internet is a key battleground. Anti-radicalization programs in social media should be quadrupled in scope — and then quadrupled again. The first challenge is to systematically analyze the tactics being used by the various terrorist groups. The subsequent task is to guide the targeted audience into questioning the propaganda being sent their way. Engage the young in this manner, and at the same time provide trained people with whom they can interact.

At the national level in Canada, we seem to be reacting on the run. This is problematic, because we may be running faster than we should in terms of deciding the best ways to proceed.

In the coming election campaign and debates, we should hope that our federal leaders make known their respective stances. While we read of wannabe jihadists going overseas or being interdicted at airports, we can't know the number of them lurking in our midst. Who can tell how many suggestible teenagers are today reading bomb-making manuals on the Internet, and listening to demented demagogues inciting them to mass murder?

It's time for Stephen Harper, Justin Trudeau and Tom Mulcair to make known their plans to prevent the radicalization of young Canadians.

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