

Tulips and Terrorism

As the Canadian Government embarks on the review of the Bill C-36, the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, and the dust settles after President George Bush's visiting remarks on our national security, the new year ushers in a time for all Canadians to reflect on the important balancing act between civil rights and national security that is before us. Events that have occurred in the Netherlands, which is often referred to as Europe's most liberal, tolerant, and multicultural society, may be helpful in our deliberations.

Annual shipments of cheerfully-coloured tulips from the Netherlands testify to the remarkably strong bonds between Dutch and Canadian society. Both countries are progressive-minded, liberal, middle powers that lean toward multi-lateral solutions in the international system. Both are staunch U.S. allies. Moreover, the Dutch and the Canadians have traditionally welcomed immigrants and encouraged the free movement of people and goods through trade across their borders.

However, there are a number of significant differences. The most telling of these is that the Netherlands has a homogenous single-culture base that still forms the majority of society, whereas Canada has had a multicultural make-up from its very beginnings. Furthermore, the Dutch have invested fully in and taken their political lead from the European Union; Canadians work closely with their superpower neighbour and strive to remain true to their founding principles.

Recently, governments of both countries have discovered that they are like all western democracies today – they are threatened by strategic terrorism.

Since 9/11, the Dutch have discovered that a growing number of young Muslims raised in the Netherlands are receptive to radical ideas and manipulation. In 2002, the Dutch Security Intelligence Service presented a paper to Parliament concluding that more and more politically-oriented young Muslims in the Netherlands were radicalizing through recruitment processes inside Dutch society. This group was identified as a considerable threat. Furthermore, Al Qaeda was assessed to be the core of a conglomerate of Muslim terrorist networks that planned a holy war against the West. This painful revelation caused deep national introspection. While atrocities in Bali and Madrid upset the international community, the Dutch were busy toughening their immigration laws, bolster-

ing their security intelligence capabilities, and strengthening their Penal Code.

Yet, even with the intolerance and fear displayed leading up to and following the 2002 assassination of Pim Fortuyn (the right-wing Dutch politician with strong anti-Muslim views who had been winning support with his anti-immigration campaign), and sociologists' findings of increasingly radicalized and resentful ethnic underclasses, British correspondent Anthony Brown assessed that the Dutch clung to their "political correctness... with politicians and media refusing to address the looming crisis." It couldn't happen here, they thought.

Two months ago, Theo Van Gogh, was killed by a Dutch-born Muslim extremist. Related to the famous painter, the Dutch filmmaker was making a film about Pim Fortuyn, and his controversial film about violence against Muslim women had recently been aired on television. The film triggered anger among the Muslim community which comprises 5.8% of the population of the Netherlands. A knife was left in Van Gogh's body with a letter that declared that jihad would bring down Europe and America.

While the murder was shocking, the backlash from Dutch society was perhaps even more stunning. A Muslim primary school was bombed; there were arson attacks on nine mosques; pigs' heads and red paint besmirched mosques and Muslim homes in Amsterdam; and police were wounded during a fire-fight with suspected terrorists in the Hague. In reprisals, five churches were attacked by arsonists. Politicians and journalists are hidden in safe-houses as a result of death threats.

After declaring that his country had been plunged into a "maelstrom of violence," Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende directed his government to react. Utilizing the *Bill on Crimes of Terrorism 2004*, which makes the recruitment of Islamic fighters, and conspiracy to commit a terrorist act,

serious criminal offences, the government arrested dozens of suspected militants. Politicians proposed to ban foreign imams, deport extremists, and strengthen security legislation. The government wrote to all municipalities urging them to increase security for potential security threats. And most telling is the dramatic turn-about of the country's newspapers that are arguing for "a very public crackdown on extremist Muslim fanatics."

There are a number of lessons to be learned from the Dutch experience.

A recent report from the *Financial Times* in London indicates that European security services believe the terrorist network centred on Al Qaeda leadership has morphed into a harlequin pattern of small and locally-organized groups across western democracies.

The problem facing multicultural democracies is not lack of integration or opportunity – it is the deadly and spreading ideology of radical extremists that must be recognized and dealt with.

Information-sharing, founded on legislation that allows intelligence and law enforcement agencies across government to act preventively, is crucial for modern national security. In order to adopt more preventive measures against terrorism and to integrate government action, an ongoing debate leading to the careful adjustment of legislation on civil liberties, including the *Privacy Act*, is paramount. Furthermore, legislation to establish the kinds of effective measures required to safeguard against terrorism must not compromise the civil liberties of law-abiding citizens. Both sides of this debate must have strong cases in order to protect us from both the terrorists and from ourselves.

Finally, while toleration is critical for modern society, ideas and acts that aim to destroy society cannot receive any toleration whatsoever.

As our nation approaches the review of the *Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act* this year, Canadians would be wise to analyze the lessons learned from our friends in the Netherlands. Like the tulips that arrive from Holland each spring, ideas gleaned from Dutch experience in adversity can only serve to improve our well-being. ■



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