



**WMRC Article**

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**Canada: Canadian Officials Claim Arrested Suspects Are Al-Qaida Head's Agents**

*It was revealed today that 19 men, arrested in pre-dawn raids around Toronto on 14 August by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, are being held under suspicion of being part of a 'sleeper cell' of Muslim terrorist group, al-Qaida, and that the men were planning attacks in Canada.*

<b>WMRC Perspective</b>	
<b>Significance</b>	The arrest of 19 suspected terrorists is the first such arrest in Canada since the attacks against the US on 11 September 2001, and the largest single arrest of alleged terrorists in Canadian history.
<b>Implications</b>	Canada supports the US-led war on terrorism and sent troops to fight in Afghanistan, but Prime Minister Jean Chretien was very outspoken in his opposition to the war in Iraq. However, Canada's denouncement of the war has not insulated it from the threat of terrorism from extreme Muslim terrorist groups.
<b>Outlook</b>	The discovery of what appears to be a 'sleeper cell' of would-be terrorists in the country is obviously an important discovery in keeping the country safe, but this is possibly not the only such cell currently operating in Canada. Despite Canada's generally positive profile in the international community, according to WMRC's Global Terrorism Index, the country still ranks 82nd out of 186, meaning it has a 'low-medium risk' of terrorism.

**Seven-Month Investigation Turns Up 19 Possible Terrorists**

On 14 August, at several different locations around Toronto, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested 19 men (18 from Pakistan and 1 from India) suspected of belonging to Osama Bin Laden's global terrorist network, al-Qaida. Police from several forces, in partnership with the RCMP and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, conducted the pre-dawn raids following a seven-month investigation called 'Project Thread'. Officers with the Public Security and Anti-Terrorism Unit (PSAT) claimed that a pattern of behaviour by a certain group of men led authorities to be suspicious. The investigation began in February 2003, when a Citizenship and Immigration visa officer became suspicious about a student who was applying for permanent resident status. The officer was unable to verify that the applicant was a student at the Ottawa Business College, as he claimed on his application, and contacted the anti-terrorism unit. Police began investigating and found that the Ottawa Business College was not a legitimate school and that foreign students and others could purchase acceptance letters, transcripts and diplomas for a fee without ever attending classes. All 19 of the men now in custody obtained illegal resident documentation through the school. Police have subsequently seized almost 400 student files from the facility. Although the men maintain their innocence, one small group left their apartment during the night and discarded all their belongings, including mattresses, clothing and computer shells, keeping only the computer hard drives. During the arrests on 14 August, one man was discovered in a pile of laundry and another jumped out of a window in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid capture. Most of the suspects are charged with immigration violations, while others are being held without any charges as a possible 'threat to national security'.

**Highlights from Canadian Anti-Terrorism Plans Following 11 September 2001 Attacks**

Since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, Canada has passed a spate of new legislation and created new agencies and initiatives to increase its efficacy in protecting the country from terrorism, spending C\$7.7bn (US\$5.4bn) over five years. The aims are as follows:

- Prevent terrorists from getting into Canada through tighter immigration policies, increased border patrols, deployment of more Canadian immigration officials at outposts abroad, and through improved identification documentation, improved screening of immigrants, refugee claimants and visitors, and new fraud-resistant Permanent Resident Cards.
- Protect Canadians from terrorist acts through new investigative tools for Canadian law enforcement and national security agencies; enhance the ability of the Government of Canada to provide a safe and secure environment for air travel; facilitate the sharing of law enforcement and national security information between federal departments and agencies; establish tighter controls over explosives and hazardous

substances; help identify and prevent harmful unauthorised use or interference with computer systems operated by counter-terrorism agencies; and deter the proliferation of biological weapons.

- Employ new strategies and tools to identify, prosecute, convict and punish terrorists, working with the international community to bring terrorists to justice.
- Enhance tighter immigration controls to remove security threats sooner; impose harsher penalties for people-smuggling as well as for people using or selling forged or false documents; and deny those deemed to be a security threat access to the refugee determination process.
- Improve strategies for critical infrastructure protection, emergency preparedness and response and expansion of anti-terrorism capacity for the military.
- Create a new air security organisation, deployment of armed undercover police officers on Canadian aircraft, explosives detection equipment and enhanced policing, and more intelligence and front-line investigative personnel.

## Chilling Details Revealed by Investigators

Among the examples of suspicious behaviour listed in an investigative document submitted to a Canadian court, one man was currently taking commercial pilot lessons to qualify as a multi-engine commercial pilot. However, his instructors describe him as an unmotivated student who has been training for almost three years, even though the average timeframe for qualification is approximately one year. In April of this year, two other associates of the group were deemed suspicious when police found them outside the gates of a nuclear power plant in Pickering, Ontario, having previously requested they be allowed to enter the secure perimeter in order to go for a walk on the beach. The flight path of the training course taken by their associate passes over the Pickering nuclear plant. Investigators also cited members of the group and their association with individuals who have access to nuclear gauges, which officials state can be used to carry out a so-called 'dirty bomb' attack. The document also revealed that members of the group experimented with explosives and wanted to find out the measurements and schematics of the Canadian National (CN) Tower and other buildings in Canada and the United States. Additional activities that captured the attention of authorities included a number of telephone calls between members of the group and a known terrorist; one suspect has links to a charity used as a fundraising front by al-Qaida; and another had a bank account balance with more than C\$40,000 (US\$28,000) but no identifiable source of income. Authorities admit that the evidence so far made known publicly is fragmented and, in some cases, circumstantial, but Canadian authorities maintain they have adequate evidence to hold the suspects indefinitely. The RCMP is not commenting with specifics on the investigation, in part because they are continuing to comb through three vanloads of evidence - primarily computers, files and phone records.

## Possible Link to 11 September Attackers?

The information made available thus far points to a number of striking similarities between the group in Canada and the terrorists that carried out the attacks in September 2001 in the US. These include the use of fraudulent student visas, the attendance of flight school and an association with a Muslim charity flagged by authorities for having ties to al-Qaida. Like the 11 September terrorists, the majority of the group in Canada entered the country as students, although they are either not studying or, according to a police report, 'engaging in school activities in what can only be called a dilatory manner.' Many of the suspects have also travelled to other countries while maintaining temporary resident status in Canada, although no members of the group worked, and they lived in very sparse accommodations in Toronto. Another tactic employed by both groups is that the men lived in smaller groups of four or five, but the living arrangements rotated, with roommates switching between the different clusters.

## Outlook and Implications

How at risk is Canada to a major terrorist attack? A recently analysis by WMRC, called the Global Terrorism Index, reveals that Canada ranks 82nd highest (US ranks 4th highest) out of a study of 186 countries - a low-medium level of risk - placing it ahead of countries such as Iran and Morocco. The study considered a number of factors

### WMRC Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

Canada ranks as the 82nd most likely country to suffer a major terrorist attack in the next 12 months out of a list of 186 countries, ranking ahead of countries such as Iran and Morocco, according to WMRC's report. For more information [click here](#).

Canada's risk is partially influenced by its support of Israel and the US-led war on terror, its proximity to the US, and the fact that it is a popular tourist destination for citizens from the US and UK - potential targets for terrorists while visiting Canada.

### GTI - Canada's Risk Profile

Ratings Component	Weighting (in %)	Score (out of 10)
Motivation	40%	5
Presence	20%	3
Scale	20%	6
Efficacy	10%	3

in its research, including: the suspected ' sleeper cells ' in Canada as previously reported by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation; the fact that US and UK tourists frequent Canadian cities, which could result in a Bali-like attack where terrorists bomb a location in Canada in an effort to kill foreign visitors; Canada's support for Israel and the US-led war on terror; and the proximity and close economic and cultural linkages to the US, making it a possible secondary target for terrorists. This is also not the first case of suspected terrorist activity in Canada. In 1999, a would-be terrorist was apprehended attempting to enter the US from Vancouver with a car boot full of explosives, and was suspected to be a member of al-Qaida with a plan to blow up the Seattle Space Needle. Although Canada is perhaps not at a heightened risk for an 11 September-styled attack, a terrorist ' weapon of mass disruption ' could be fairly easily employed in an effort to wreak havoc on everyday life in Canada. The power blackout that began on 14 August, which affected 50 million homes in north-eastern US and south-eastern Canada, although not the result of a terrorist plot, revealed how vulnerable the infrastructure, on which both countries depend, is to a terrorist attack. Other critical elements of Canadian infrastructure such as telecommunications hubs, transportation networks, water supplies and essential public services - many of which are owned and operated by the private sector - are particularly vulnerable.

<b>Prevention</b>	10%	1.5
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		42.5
<b>Rank: 82 out of 186 (Low/Medium Risk)</b>		

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