

Summary

Canada has a long history of political violence, and it has not been immune to the major trends shaping terrorism in the second half of the twentieth century: decolonization, the Cold War, and the transportation and media revolutions. Those trends gave rise to terrorism that was motivated mostly by nationalism, inspired by a “cult of the guerrilla,” supported by state sponsors, global in reach and impact, and increasingly lethal. However, with few exceptions, Canada’s experience of terrorism was less frequent, less lethal, and less disruptive than those of many other countries. These exceptions include the Front de Libération du Québec campaign (1963-70) and the Air India bombing (1985). Even so, Canada responded firmly, even harshly, to major campaigns of domestic terrorism, an approach that received wide public support. But with the exception of the period of the October Crisis (1970), before 9/11 the Canadian public did not feel vulnerable to terrorism. Thus, even though the security and intelligence community did not share the view, Parliament and the public did not consider counter-terrorism to be a high priority and therefore it lacked a political constituency. As a consequence, Canada’s organizational, legal, and policy instruments have not always been adequate or appropriate to the task of counter-terrorism and may not have kept pace with the changing character of international terrorism.

This historical experience tells us a number of things. First, in the absence of a serious domestic terrorism threat, it will not matter much if the United States feels Canada has not done enough to reduce America’s vulnerability to attacks from Canada. The Ressam case (1999) was an object lesson in this respect. So, even when the threat is intermittent, Canada has to show the United States that it takes the problem seriously. This means giving attention to all aspects of counter-terrorism preparations *before* a threat emerges, not while it is occurring. Second, we cannot anticipate all possible threats and cover all possible targets. Therefore, we have to manage risk, investing resources against the most likely threats. This puts a premium on security intelligence, but since terrorism can be inspired or guided from abroad, security intelligence cannot solely be focused inward. Canadian politicians, security officials and the public need to consider seriously whether the time has

come to bolster our foreign human intelligence collection capabilities. Finally, the federal government cannot take a “go it alone” approach to counter-terrorism, at home or abroad. On the domestic front it requires a whole-of-government effort across institutional boundaries, through all jurisdictions and in the private sector. This will require collaboration. The federal government must take the lead in setting goals and standards and providing funding. It is also essential that the government continue to engage its foreign partners to contribute to collective counter-terrorism security efforts and to ensure that Canada’s interests are protected.