

Canada and the Arab Islamists: *Plus ça change...*

By Alex Wilner

Canada is a curious political animal. It is a stalwart democracy and a leading economic and energy powerhouse, a founding member of the UN, NATO and the G7/8, and a member of both the Commonwealth of Nations (i.e. the British Commonwealth) and its French counterpart, *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*. It has built, on its own terms, a special relationship with most of the world's great powers. And it stands proudly by its military history (from the First and Second World Wars to the 2011 Libyan intervention) but pays equal homage to the role it played in establishing the UN's "peacekeeping" function (which Canadian Foreign Minister and future Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, first proposed in 1956 in response to the Suez Crisis) and the UN's *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) principle (the product of a 2000 Canadian initiative co-written by Canadian scholar and wantabe **[aspiring?]** Prime Minister, Michael Ignatieff). In sum, Canada is a widely respected international leader. And yet, paradoxically, despite its ability to influence, direct, and lead global affairs, Canada rarely does. It remains a cautious nation with a small and tidy international footprint.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Canada's patchy (and at times, non-existent) relationship with the Islamist political forces currently rising in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Though Canadians abhor despotism and cheer democratic reform, they seem perplexed by the revolutions that have rocked the MENA region, and uncertain, as to what the Islamists represent and how their rise to power will affect individual MENA countries, the region more broadly, and Canadian interests more specifically. And yet, Canadian policies concerning the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other regional Islamist forces, seem to perpetuate and uphold Canada's historic policy positions *vis-à-vis* the old Arab guard: more open, accountable, and inclusive political (and economic) liberalization is desired; the protection of human rights and of religious and sexual minorities and women is a necessity; and regional stability that includes a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a priority. It is likely that no matter the political futures of Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and their neighbors, and no matter how well Islamists place in general and presidential elections, that Canada's foreign policy will echo that of years past. For Canadians, *plus ça change ... plus c'est la même chose* (the more things change the more they stay the same).

This chapter will do three things. First, it will briefly explore Canadian attitudes *vis-à-vis* political Islam. It will focus on recent history, and especially the decade since 9/11. While relying on such a shallow historical narrative certainly truncates the history of Islamic political thought, like much of the Western world (but perhaps even more so than in Europe and the United States), most Canadians were only introduced to political Islam as a result of al Qaeda's violent extremism. Rightly or wrongly, political violence rather than Islamist political thought has informed Canadian associations with (ostensibly) non-violent Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. Second, Canadian positions during the Arab Spring and regarding the recent and forthcoming

elections in the MENA region will be reviewed. Special attention will be paid to Canada's concerns for human rights, which informed its participation in NATO's 2011 Libyan campaign. Third, this chapter will attempt to sketch the future of Canadian relations with Islamist parties and rulers. The conclusion suggests that unless Canada's primary foreign policy concerns (i.e. democratization, human rights, and regional stability) are challenged or if incoming Islamist political parties dramatically alter the current status quo, Canadian relations with the new MENA governments will remain generally unfazed.

The Past: A Rude Awakening

Historically, Canada has had very little structured dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood or political Islam more generally. Unlike various European countries, which are geographically and socially linked to the MENA region, and unlike the United States, which has critical national interests on a global scale, Canada has traditionally maintained little reason to engage itself in political Islam's theological affairs or strategic backyard. Ottawa has been neither for, nor against, political developments among Muslim and Islamic communities. Indeed, these sorts of developments rarely appear on Canada's radar. And when they do, Canada seldom acts alone to address them. Rather, Canadian policies have been developed multilaterally in concert with Canada's various allies and friends—as is usually the case in Canadian foreign affairs.

For illustration, consider Canadian-Iranian relations. Ottawa's relationship with Tehran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution followed general trends and concerns shared by other Western capitals. Only when Canadian interests were specifically challenged—as happened recently with the 2003 rape, torture, and beating death of Iranian-Canadian photojournalist, Zahra Kazemi, who was killed, the Canadian government emphasizes, “in an Iranian prison by regime officials”—has Ottawa unilaterally taken forceful, and at times provocative, measures.¹ In the Kazemi case, Canada, under both Liberal and Conservative Party leadership, has called for an official investigation; sought to establish an international forensics team to examine her body; demanded that her remains be repatriated; rejected Iran's handling of the criminal investigation and subsequent trials; repeatedly recalled its ambassador from Tehran; held Parliamentary subcommittee hearings on the case; and formally tightened its “Controlled Engagement Policy” with Iran, which downgraded bilateral relations and limited official contact between the two countries to concerns over Iran's violation of human rights, the Kazemi case, and nuclear proliferation issues.² Canada eventually severed relations with Iran in September 2012, closing its Embassy in Tehran and expelling Iranian diplomats from Canada.³ Canadian courts have also signaled that Kazemi's Canadian relatives have the legal right to

¹ Government of Canada, “Canada-Iran Relations: Fact Sheet,” Accessed December 2012, (http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/iran/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada-iran.aspx?lang=eng&view=d)

² *CBC News*, “Zahra Kazemi: Iran's Changing Story,” November 27, 2007; Government of Canada, Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 40th Parliament, 2nd Session, Number 015, April 30, 2009.

³ Laura Payton, “Canada Closes Embassy in Iran, Expels Iranian Diplomats”, *CBC News*, September 7, 2012.

sue Iran and its leaders, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for culpability in her death.⁴ There are numerous and obvious differences between Iran's current political system and the one the Muslim Brotherhood and their associates are establishing in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere. The Canadian-Iranian example is not meant to force a parallel between them. But Canada's response to Iran's human rights record certainly does suggest the manner in which the Canadian government might react to similar developments occurring elsewhere in the MENA region in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Not surprisingly, Canadian citizens have themselves historically approached Islamist political movements in a similar fashion to their governments. They have expressed reserved curiosity until matters required their attention. On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda killed 24 Canadians. It was the largest loss of Canadian life in a single act of terrorism since the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182. And it shaped Canadian assessments of political Islam for much of the following decade. This is not to suggest that Canadians were unfamiliar with Islam or Muslims before 2001. Indeed, they were. Canada, as a leading destination for immigrants, including those from the Muslim and Arab world, has a vibrant and growing Muslim community. The 2001 national census found that 580,000 Canadians (of a total 29.6 million population) identified as Muslim.⁵ Canada's largest cities, like Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, each have sizable, organized, and active Muslim communities. Mosques, halal establishments, and Muslim religious, cultural and educational organizations make up part of Canada's cultural and religious mosaic. Consider that even in Alberta—long a bastion of Canadian conservatism—a Muslim-Canadian, Naheed Nenshi, was elected mayor of Calgary. Or consider that between 2007 and 2012, one of Canada's most popular television sitcoms—which aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Canada's publically funded version of the BBC—was *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. Canadians are no strangers to Islam.

But until 9/11, political Islam was not a topic Canadians were particularly familiar with and religiously inspired political violence was not a national security concern. That sort of conflict usually occurred “over there,” far from Canada's shores and away from Canadian interests. With 9/11, however, Canadians found themselves in the crosshairs, and like other Westerners, they sought broader perspectives to help them untangle the socio-religious ideologies and political motivations that underpinned al Qaeda's violence. The debates Canadians eventually held concerning political Islam were necessarily colored by militant Islamism. And now that movements and political parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood are taking power in North Africa and the Middle East,

⁴ See the various documents compiled by the Canadian Center for International Justice, “CCIJ's Public Cases and Interventions: Zahra Kazemi,” accessed December 2012, http://ccij.ca/programs/cases/index.php?WEBYEP_DI=10.

⁵ Statistics Canada, “Population by Religions, by Province and Territory,” (2001 Census). Data collected by the Pew Forum places the population at roughly 900,000 for 2010. See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The Future of the Global Muslim Population”, January 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population/?sort=Pop2010>.

these early debates will likely continue to influence Canadian positions and policies. Five recent cases are worth exploring.

First, Canada's participation in the Afghan conflict was primarily centered on combatting the Taliban, destroying al Qaeda, and establishing a viable and indigenous democratic system that could effectively inoculate Afghans against militant Islamist ideologies. By 2006, Canada had taken a leadership role in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province, committing roughly 2,500 Canadian Forces (CF) and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) personnel to reverse gains achieved by the Taliban insurgency.⁶ Committing Canadian troops to the Afghan mission protected Afghans and Canadians alike by dislodging the Taliban and keeping al Qaeda on the run. Without a base of operations, Canadians believed, al Qaeda could not easily conduct international attacks that might again kill and injure Canadians. "These are detestable murderers and scumbags," explained General Rick Hillier, Chief of Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces, "we're not going to let those radical murderers and killers rob from others and certainly we're not going to let them rob from Canada."⁷ Defeating proponents of a militant Islamist ideology that was responsible for 9/11 and working under a UN mandate and alongside other NATO allies, Canadians were compelled to send soldiers overseas. The conversation Canadians have since had about their evolving role in Afghanistan has revolved around combatting militant political Islam and stabilizing the country. As an interesting aside, a very similar debate is currently unfolding with regards to Canada's responsibility to bolster international efforts to confront the militant Islamists of northern Mali.⁸

Second, between 2004 and 2005, a debate took place in Quebec and Ontario regarding Sharia Law. In short, the debates centered on the extent religious-based arbitration panels using Sharia would be allowed to be consulted to settle family-based legal disputes. The issue sparked a ferocious intellectual debate that spilled into heated street demonstrations. Opponents suggested that empowering Sharia in Canada would weaken the separation between "church and state," blurring the line between religion and secular liberal democracy. Others argued that under Sharia Law, "men and women are not treated equally."⁹ In the end, the Quebec government, in a 2004 motion supported *unanimously* by all members of the National Assembly, barred the use of Sharia Law in Quebec courts. The Quebec government later established the *Bouchard-Taylor Commission* to study the issue of "reasonable accommodation" of religious and cultural minorities more thoroughly. In Ontario, the Sharia debate ended the following year, with Premier Dalton McGuinty stating, "I've come to the conclusion that the debate has gone on long enough. There will be no sharia law in Ontario. There will be one law for all Ontarians."¹⁰ Both debates were widely covered in Canada's

⁶ Nearly 160 Canadians have been killed in Afghanistan, placing Canadian casualties behind only those of the United Kingdom and the United States among Western coalition partners.

⁷ General Rick Hillier, quoted in Daniel Leblanc, "JTF2 to Hunt al-Qaeda," *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 2005.

⁸ Jane Taber, "How Canadian Troops Could End up in Mali," *Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2012; Jane Taber, "Mixed Messages on Mali have Opposition Pressing for Clarity," *Globe and Mail*, December 31, 2012.

⁹ *CBC News*, "Shariah Law: Indepth," May 26, 2005

¹⁰ Colin Freeze and Karen Howlett, "McGuinty Government Rules Out Use of Sharia Law," *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 2005.

national and regional newspapers; the general tone was that Sharia was bad for Canadians, bad for women, and bad for democracy.

Third, in 2006, Canadians woke to the threat of Islamist homegrown terrorism. A group of young Canadian Muslims—dubbed the “Toronto 18” —were arrested as they were preparing truck bombs for use against targets in Toronto. During the lengthy trials, it became clear that the group espoused al Qaeda’s vision and sought to kill Canadians in its name. Roughly half of those arrested eventually pled guilty and several others were found guilty in a court of law. Another two dozen Canadians—like Mohammed Jabarrah, Mohammad Khawaja, Said Namouh, Tahawwur Rana, Sayfildin Sharif, Hiva Alizadeh, Misbahuddin Ahmed, Khurram Syed Sher, Mohamed Warsame, and various others—have been arrested and/or convicted on similar charges in Canada and overseas. And other Canadian citizens—like Mohamed Hassan Hersi, Ferid Ahmed Imam, Maiwand Yar, Mohammed Elmi Ibrahim, and others—are thought to have travelled to Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere to join and train with foreign militant groups. Once again, as a result of each of these cases, the prism through which Canadians interpreted political Islam was infused with political violence, this time the home-grown rather than foreign-grown variant.

Fourth, over the past five years Canadians have debated Muslim religious dress, and specifically, the face veil worn by some Muslim women. Like the debates that have taken place in France, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, the niqab and burka are the focal points. In Quebec, the government tabled Bill 94 in 2010, a controversial piece of legislation that lays out the conditions under which women who wear face coverings would be allowed to work in the public sector or do business with Quebec government officials and institutions. In announcing the bill, Quebec Premier Jean Charest argued that “this [bill] is not about making our home less welcoming, but about stressing the values that unite us ... An accommodation cannot be granted unless it respects the principle of equality between men and women, and the religious neutrality of the state.”¹¹ The bill is still being considered but the prospect of its acceptance would be significant. The legislation could well force women to show their faces when receiving the services offered by government-funded institutions, including public schools, nurseries, and hospitals. Similar debates have occurred elsewhere in Canada. In Ontario, courts have ruled that individuals testifying in a trial must remove their niqab or burka if wearing them “jeopardizes” a fair trial. The ruling was handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada and upheld by the Ontario Court of Appeals in relation to a high-profile Toronto case in which a veiled Muslim woman refused to remove her niqab while testifying in a sexual assault case.¹² And more recently, in 2011, the Canadian federal government announced that Muslim immigrants would be barred from wearing full-facial coverings when taking their oaths of citizenship. The Minister for Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, explained that “allowing a group to hide their faces while they are becoming members of our

¹¹ *Canadian Press*, “Quebec Bans Niqab from Government Services,” March 24, 2010.

¹² Kirk Makin, “Niqab must be Removed if Trial Fairness Jeopardized, Court Rules,” *Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2010.

community is counter to Canada's commitment to openness, equality, and social cohesion."¹³ Again, all of these cases received detailed media attention across Canada and helped shape national perceptions concerning the role of women in Islam.

Fifth, religiously motivated "honour killings"—in which individuals murder family members (usually young women) for behaviour (usually sexual in nature) that is perceived as having brought shame to the family—appear to be on the rise in Canada. Over a dozen high-profile cases have been reported in recent years.¹⁴ Many of these cases involve immigrant Canadians from Muslim-majority countries who struggle to adapt their "strict old-world ways" to the rights and liberties enjoyed by all Canadians. Herein, younger members of these families some of whom are first-generation Canadians—act in ways that are deemed religiously and culturally inappropriate, "shaming" the more traditional sensitivities of the older generations.¹⁵ In extreme cases, a family member avenges the perceived dishonour by murdering the supposed offender. The more recent cases, like those of Khatera Sadiqi, shot to death by her brother in 2006, Aqsa Parvez, slain in 2007 by her Pakistani-Canadian father and brother, and the 2009 Shafia family murders, in which four women, including three Shafia teenage girls, were killed by their Afghan-Canadian family members, have garnered months of front-page media attention in Canada. Following the 2012 guilty verdicts handed down in the Shafia trial, Ontario Superior Court Judge Robert Maranger argued that, "it is difficult to conceive of a more heinous, more despicable, more honourless crime ... The apparent reason behind these cold-blooded, shameful murders was that the four completely innocent victims offended your completely twisted concept of honour ... that has absolutely no place in any civilized society."¹⁶ His sentiments are likely shared by a vast majority of Canadians, of all religious backgrounds.¹⁷ Indeed, the Shafia case was deemed a "shocking wake-up call ... for Canadians Muslims," in particular.¹⁸

The circumstances surrounding each of these events, and the manner in which they have been debated by Canadians, is important. Since 2000, Canadians have taken leaps and bounds in their understanding of political Islam. But that understanding has been consistently shaped by threats to Canadian security by militant Islamists and by perceived challenges to liberalism, democracy, and the rights of women and minorities by proponents of religious law. Today, with the Muslim Brotherhood surging to electoral power in some of the countries caught-up by the Arab Spring, Canadians are likely to interpret these "new" Islamist movements using their recently-acquired perspectives. If so, no dramatic warming of Canadian foreign relations should be (automatically) expected with the Muslim Brotherhood and its associated parities, notwithstanding their democratic

¹³ *National Post*, "Niqabs, Burkas must be Removed during Citizenship Ceremonies: Jason Kenney," December 12, 2011.

¹⁴ Gerald Caplan, "Honour Killings in Canada: Even Worse than we Believe," *Globe and Mail*, July 23, 2010.

¹⁵ Tobi Cohen, "Honour Killings on the Rise in Canada: Expert," *Canwest News Service*, June 19, 2010.

¹⁶ Timothy Appleby, "Judge Condemns 'sick notion of honour,'" *Globe and Mail*, January 30, 2012.

¹⁷ See, Nazneen Sheikh, "No Culture Experts Required for 'Honour' Crimes," *Globe and Mail*, February 1, 2012; Adnan Khan, "We have Failed to Protect Muslims Women under Threat," *Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2012; Margaret Wentz, "Call Honour Crimes what they are," *Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2012.

¹⁸ Sheema Khan, "Shafia Trial a Wake-up Call for Canadian Muslims," *Globe and Mail*, January 30, 2012.

successes. If anything, given their Islamist stripes and given recent Canadian debates, these new governments may be approached by Canada with even more suspicion. And yet, that will not necessarily result in a dramatically altered Canadian foreign policy either. Exploring Canadian reactions to the 2011 Libyan conflict helps illustrate why.

The Present: Speak Up, But Carry a Small Stick

When it became clear that Hosni Mubarak's regime would succumb to the popular protests rocking Egypt, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper quipped: "I think the old expression is: 'They're not going to put the toothpaste back in the tube on this one.'"¹⁹ In all seriousness, however, Prime Minister Harper articulated Canada's position accordingly:

"We stand by the people of Egypt [...] for their steadfast support for the fundamental values that Canadians profoundly share with them [...] Canada supports universal values—including freedom, democracy, and justice—and the right to the freedom of assembly, speech, and information. [...] We encourage all parties to work together to ensure an orderly transition toward a free and vibrant society [...] We urge all parties in Egypt to renounce violence and allow peaceful and meaningful dialogue between the people and government to address political, economic, and social concerns. This dialogue should lead to free and fair elections and a government that supports universal values."²⁰

That the focus of Harper's announcement was on democracy, human rights, and regional security was not surprising. To a certain extent, his statement was in keeping with Canada's historical penchant for supporting democracy, stabilizing war zones, safeguarding the rights and freedoms of at-risk communities and minorities, and acting in concert with like-minded states. In Egypt and Tunisia, the revolutions ended successfully and quickly. The loss of civilian life was, comparatively speaking, low, and Canada's concerns were never entirely an issue. But Libya was a different matter. The apprehensions that Canada expressed in regard to Egypt were the same but, in contrast, by February and March 2011 the situation in Libya seemed to be heading towards a humanitarian disaster. Once it became clear that the United States and the major European players were intent on taking action, Canada positioned itself to take a leading role in facilitating the international intervention.

The day after the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 1970, imposing broad sanctions against Libya, Canada responded in kind. It banned the trade of weapons with Libya, imposed a travel ban on Muammar Gaddafi and 15 other Libyan nationals, froze Libya's financial assets in Canada, and—going beyond UN demands but acting in step with the United States and others—prohibited all financial transactions with the Libyan Government, its institutions, and agencies, including the Libyan Central Bank. In describing these actions, Prime Minister Harper condemned Gaddafi

¹⁹ *Canadian Press*, "Harper: Canada Wants Free and Fair Elections in Egypt," February 11, 2011.

²⁰ Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Recent Events in Egypt," Ottawa, Ontario, February 1, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=3925>.

personally, calling him the “root cause” for the bloodshed in Libyan and demanded that he “immediately vacate his position and authority.”²¹ This echoed demands coming from other western capitals all calling for Gaddafi “to go.”

And again, following the establishment of UNSC Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, which authorized the use of military force against Libya, Canada immediately signalled its willingness to participate in the campaign. Canada’s existing operation in Libya (*Operation MOBILE*), which began on February 25, 2011 as a “whole-of-government effort” to evacuate Canadian citizens from Libya, and officially became a combat mission on March 19, two days after the UNSC resolution was passed. It was then further converted and rolled into NATO’s *Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR* three days after that.²² Canada’s contribution to the conflict included over 600 military personnel, seven CF-18 Hornet fighter jets, three in-flight refuelling tankers, and two CP-140 Aurora patrol aircraft. This was a modest contribution when compared to the forces offered by the United States, UK, and France, but given the size of Canada’s military, it was deemed a major military operation. In total, Canadian aircraft conducted nearly 1,500 sorties, including roughly 950 combat operations. These “numbers don’t tell the whole story,” Prime Minister Harper later pointed out, because “Canadian fighter jets flew [...] roughly 10 percent of all sorties—without caveats—against Gadhafi’s military. Canadians should also know that the taking of Tripoli by rebel forces was materially assisted by the CF-18 missions that cleared away Gadhafi’s remaining mechanized forces.”²³

Canada contributed in other ways, as well. Two Canadian warships, *HMCS Vancouver* and *HMCS Charlottetown*, were dispatched to help patrol Libya’s coast. They conducted numerous boardings and inspections of suspicious ships and assisted in combat operations. Otherwise, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, John Baird, travelled to Libya twice while the conflict was ongoing; he was the first allied foreign minister to tour Gadhafi’s fortified compound in Tripoli after it fell to rebel forces. And besides the cost of Canada’s military contribution, reported as \$350 million, Canada also pledged to help finance the post-conflict stabilization.²⁴ And to top it all off, Lieutenant-General Joseph Jacques Charles Bouchard, a Canadian, was given command of NATO’s entire Libyan operation. He was awarded a U.S. Legion of Merit (his third), a Canadian Meritorious Service Cross,

²¹ Stephen Harper, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Implementing Sanctions against Libya,” Ottawa, Ontario, February 27, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=3997>; Government of Canada, “Legislative Background for New Regulations”, February 25, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=5&featureId=6&pageId=48&id=3998>.

²² Canadian Department of National Defence, “Operation MOBILE,” accessed December 2012, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/feature-vedette/2011/02/libya-libye-eng.asp>.

²³ *The Canadian Press*, “Harper hails Libya mission as ‘great military success,’” May 11, 2012.

²⁴ *CBC News*, “Libya mission’s final costs reach \$347M,” May 11, 2012; Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “Minister Fast Undertakes Trade Mission to Help Canadian Companies Get Back to Business in the New Libya,” January 30, 2012, accessed December 2012, http://www.international.gc.ca/media_commerce/comm/news-communicues/2012/01/30a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d.

and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for his services. As the troops headed home, Harper praised their accomplishments:

“You embody our commitment to international law, to the rights and freedoms we cherish in a democratic society [...] let no one ever question whether Canada is prepared to stay the course in defence of what is right. For we believe that in a world where people look for hope and cry out for freedom, those who talk the talk of human rights must from time to time be prepared to likewise walk the walk.”²⁵

Canada, it appeared, had done its part to assist those striving (and dying) for democratic reform under the banner of the Arab Spring. Of importance: Canada’s military participation in Libya came with barely any official debate at all. Only on March 21, two days *after* the government had already accepted a military role for Canada, did Parliament openly discuss the issue. The debate lasted three hours and support for Canada’s military mission was unanimous. Parliamentarians revisited Canada’s military contribution three months later in June, debating a motion to extend the mission into September; only a single “no” vote was recorded. A third Parliamentarian debate was held in September 2011 to discuss again extending the mission; more than two-thirds of Parliament agreed.²⁶ In sum, Canada’s Libyan mission was deemed necessary and just by a vast majority of Canadians.

Canada’s rationale for participating in the Libyan campaign was primarily a result of the very real threat to civilians stemming from Gaddafi’s intent to “cleanse Libya house by house” of its traitorous “cockroaches.” “I have not yet ordered the use of force,” he warned on February 22, but “when I do, everything will burn.”²⁷ His intentions seemed clear, and Canada, like others, took him at his word. But open threats would not have been enough to compel Canada to action. That the United States and Canada’s traditional allies, including France, the UK, Italy, and others, were also participating in the UN mandated Libyan campaign, greatly facilitated Canada’s entry. Indeed, without international support, Canada would not have intervened in Libya at all. Importantly, this helps explain Canada’s limited action concerning the civil war in Syria. In contrast to Libya, the deteriorating situation in Syria has yet to garner active Canadian involvement. The conflict, by some estimates, has already resulted in the death of well over 60,000 people (by December 2012), appears to be slipping into a bloody sectarian conflict, and has the potential to spiral into a much larger regional conflict (involving Iran, Hezbollah, Israel, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and remnants of al Qaeda). At issue is that the UN Security Council has been divided as to sanctioning international intervention and most Western powers are loath to talk openly about starting a Libyan-style mission over Syria. Such an intervention will be exceptionally high-risk, complex, and complicated. Canada,

²⁵ Meagan Fitzpatrick, “Honours for mission to end ‘brutal’ Libyan regime,” *CBC News*, November 24, 2011.

²⁶ For complete transcripts of the entire debates, see [Openparliament.ca](http://openparliament.ca) (<http://openparliament.ca/debates/2011/>), “March 21,” “June 14,” and “September 26,” accessed December 2012.

²⁷ *BBC News*, “Libya Protests: Defiant Gaddafi Refuses to Quit,” February 22, 2011

to no one's surprise, has taken a traditional wait-and-see approach. It has followed its friends and allies by shutting its Embassy in Damascus, freezing Syrian assets, prohibiting investment in Syria's petroleum industry, banning all Syrian imports (excluding food products) and all Canadian luxury exports, and expelling, *en masse*, all Syrian diplomats following the particularly gruesome Houla massacre in mid-May 2012.²⁸ But unless and until Canada's allies muster international support for a more concerted military intervention—as they did in the case of Libya—Canadian troops will remain in their barracks.

The Future: Much the Same...Unless

Given the manner in which Canadians have historically debated political Islam, and considering Canada's broad reaction to the Arab Spring and more focused approach concerning Libya, what might we expect for the future? How will Canadians and Canada respond to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates in North Africa and the Middle East? While offering prognostications (in print, no less) is a dangerous habit, I want to conclude by suggesting that unless the incoming Islamist parties dramatically alter the political or societal status quo; or purposefully impede further democratic reform; or actively curtail the rights and freedoms of women or minority group; or use violence against vulnerable communities, that Canada's foreign policy with incoming MENA governments will remain generally unfazed. And, underpinning all of this, Canadian policies will almost surely echo those pursued by its friends and allies in the United States, the UK, France, and elsewhere. The bottom line is that what happens next will depend on how the Muslim Brotherhood and associates decide to govern. In Canada's case, two particular developments are worth watching.

The first concerns Israel. At a May 2012 address in Washington, D.C., Foreign Minister Baird said: "Israel has no greater friend in the world than Canada [...] our strong support for Israel is not about politics at home. And it certainly is not about winning popularity contests at the United Nations ... [F]or us it's all about values. Canada and Israel [...] share the same values. We respect freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We have a history of defending the vulnerable, challenging the aggressor and confronting evil."²⁹ Simply put, Canada is a staunch ally of Israel. While the Canadian media like to suggest that Prime Minister Harper and his Conservative Party have dramatically strengthened Canadian-Israeli ties in recent years, this is only half the story.³⁰ Past Canadian Prime Ministers from different political parties have also been strong advocates of Israel. And during Shimon Peres's 2012 visit to Canada, the Israeli President was warmly welcomed by the leaders of all three of Canada's major federal political parties. Even Thomas Mulcair, leader of the

²⁸ *Associated Press*, "Most Syrians Killed in Massacre Shot at Close Range," May 29, 2012; *CBC News*, "Canada Joins Allies in Mass Expulsion of Syrian Diplomats," May 29, 2012.

²⁹ John Baird, "Address by Minister Baird to the American Jewish Committee," Washington, D.C., May 3, 2012, accessed December 2012, <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/speeches-discours/2012/05/03a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d>

³⁰ See for instance: Campbell Clark, "Canada protests 'One-sided' Resolutions with Pro-Israel Stand at UN," *Globe and Mail*, December 22, 2011; Mike Blanchfield, "John Baird Bares Teeth in Offering Canada's Defence of Israel at UN," *Canadian Press*, October 18, 2011; Jeffrey Simpson, "How the Political Shift among Jewish Voters Plays in Canada," *Globe and Mail*, September 28, 2011.

New Democratic Party (NDP) and current leader of the Official Opposition, lent Israel his party's support.³¹ The NDP is Canada's leading left-of-center party and is traditionally critical of Israel; that may well change under Mulcair's stewardship.

The bottom line is that Canada will not happily accept dramatic shifts to Arab-Israeli relations. This is especially true in the case of Egypt (and Jordan, too, if the political landscape changes in Amman as well). Following the violent rampage against Israel's embassy in Cairo in September 2011, Prime Minister Harper warned that, "Canada expects Egypt to honour its commitment to uphold its international agreements—including its peace treaty with Israel."³² This was in keeping with similar demands from Washington, London, and elsewhere. Given the Muslim Brotherhood's views *vis-à-vis* Israel, its penchant to threaten the Camp David Accords to attract support, and its historic relationship with Hamas and other regional militants, Harper's warning was not idle talk.³³ Were Egypt's new leaders to radically alter its foreign policy with Israel, Canada would likely react strongly.

The second issue involves the treatment of minority communities and women. Recent attacks against Copts in Egypt, like the 2011 attacks in Alexandria, Imbaba, Maspiro, and elsewhere, have deeply troubled Canadians. "The Government of Canada strongly condemns the violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt," Prime Minister Harper stated in May 2011. "Canada is a tolerant, multicultural country with a proud tradition of defending religious minorities around the world. We stand behind the Coptic Christian community and their right to practice their faith in safety and security, free of persecution. This is a universal human right and one which our Government is committed to defending."³⁴ The security and welfare of Coptic communities resonates with Canadians on a domestic level. While estimates vary, Canada may have the largest Coptic diaspora after the United States, with a community of roughly 250,000.³⁵ Canadian political leaders have often vied for their support. In fact, while running for reelection in October 2011, Harper visited a Toronto-area Coptic community center to announce his plans to establish a major new bureau, the Office for Religious Freedoms, within the Department of Foreign Affairs.³⁶ The office, which is still being developed, will focus on advocating on the behalf of threatened international religious

³¹ *Globe and Mail*, "Israeli President set for Warm Reception from Mulcair," May 6, 2012; Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf, "New NDP Leaders Strongly Backs Israel," *Canadian Jewish News*, March 26, 2012.

³² Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Cairo," Ottawa, Ontario, September 20, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=3&id=4333>

³³ Zvi Bar'el, "Muslim Brotherhood: We will not put Egypt-Israel peace treaty to referendum," *Haaretz*, April 7, 2012; David Kirkpatrick, "Islamist Victors in Egypt Seeking Shift by Hamas," *New York Times*, March 24, 2012; David Kirkpatrick, "Egyptian Party Threatens to Review Treaty with Israel," *New York Times*, February 16, 2012.

³⁴ Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the situation in Egypt," Ottawa, Ontario, May 9, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=3&id=4101>

³⁵ *Canadian Press*, "Harper meets with Coptic Christian Priests," January 13, 2011.

³⁶ Steven Chase, "Harper pledges to create watchdog office for global religious freedom," *Globe and Mail*, October 4, 2011; Steven Chase, "Conservatives laying groundwork for Office of Religious Freedom," *Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2012;

minorities, opposing religious hatred abroad, and promoting “Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance.”³⁷ That hundreds of thousands of Copts have left Egypt since early 2011, and that roughly one-sixth of them have purportedly relocated to Canada, suggests the issue of religious intolerance will remain a sensitive issue in Canadian politics for some time.³⁸ Likewise, as the domestic debates concerning Sharia in Canada reveal, some worry about the fate of women under Islamist governance. As Patrick Martin, the Middle East correspondent for Canada’s leading national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, noted following Egypt’s preliminary presidential election in May 2012, “the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to repeal laws ... that broadened women’s rights (particularly their right to divorce) on the grounds that these laws were imposed under foreign pressure ... [and it] is keen to use the power of government to shape the morality of its citizens in matters of modesty, alcohol consumption and freedom of expression.”³⁹ For Canadians, the treatment of women, like the treatment of religious minorities, will remain a humanitarian concern. For the Canadian government, these concerns may well influence foreign policy.

It is worth reiterating: Canada’s support for the Libyan intervention at the height of the Arab Spring was largely based on humanitarian considerations, as is its evolving policy towards Syria. This suggests that the manner in which minority groups and women in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere are treated under the incoming Islamist governments will partially determine Canada’s future foreign relations. Violence against Copts in Egypt, for instance, is widely attributed to Salafi thugs. That ultraconservative Salafi-oriented political parties (notably Hizb Al-Nour) now enjoy impressive clout in Egypt’s emerging political landscape might lead to the gradual institutionalization of intolerance.⁴⁰ The same may hold for the rights and freedom of women, too. For Canadians, the persecution of minorities—especially Jews, Bahi’a, and Christians living in Muslim-majority countries—along with the treatment of women, will resonate strongly. How strongly, and to what effect these positions will have on Canadian policy, will depend on the Islamists.

³⁷ *Canadian Press*, “Religious freedom office defended by Baird,” January 2, 2012.

³⁸ Andre Aciman, “After Egypt’s Revolution, Christians are Living in Fear,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2011; Negar Azimi, “In Egypt, the Lure of Leaving,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2011; Lawrence Solomon, “Exodus from the Arab Spring,” *Globe and Mail*, October 14, 2011.

³⁹ Patrick Martin, “Will Egypt Finish the Islamist Arc—or be the First to Buck the Trend?” *Globe and Mail*, May 26, 2012. See also, Hamida Ghafour, “Was the Arab Spring a Step Backwards for Women?” *Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2012; *Agence France-Presse*, “Sharia Law Declaration Raises fears among Women in New Libya,” October 24, 2011; Mona Eltahawy, “Why Do They Hate Us?” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2012.

⁴⁰ David Kirkpatrick, “In Egypt, No Alliance with Ultraconservatives, Islamist Party Says,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2011; Yasmine Saleh, “Copts to Shun Islamists in Egypt’s Presidential Vote,” *Reuters*, May 15, 2012.