



## Briefing Cycle: Strategic Global Issues 2010-02-19



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### CANADA, ISRAEL AND THE RADICAL NARRATIVE

**Issue:** On February 12, 2010 Peter Kent, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Americas said that “an attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada.” Kent made the statement in an interview with *Shalom Life*, a Toronto area Jewish community newspaper, while commenting more broadly on recent developments in Iran. The interview and its contents were picked up by the *Globe and Mail* and received national coverage on February 17.

**Comment:** While there has never been any real question that Canadian Middle East policy is predicated on a broadly pro-Israel outlook, this is one of the strongest statements yet made by a member of Cabinet. While Minister Kent is certainly doing no more than communicating a Government position, his statement could have national security implications for the RCMP.

Discussions of the broad “narrative” that contributes to neo-jihadist radicalization generally focus on two issues: Afghanistan and Iraq. These loom large in public consciousness for a variety of reasons — not least because western soldiers are dying there, but also because Islamist ideologues from Osama bin Laden on down tend to emphasize them.

In the midst of this, it is easy to forget that the Israel / Palestine issue is not only a key thread in the radicalization narrative — which states that the West is fundamentally “at war” with Islam — it is one of the oldest threads as well. For 60 years, what is seen as the displacement of Palestinians by the State of Israel has been an endless source of trauma and humiliation for Muslims, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia. Indeed, Israeli independence in 1948 is referred to in Arabic simply as the *nakba*, the Catastrophe.

This recasting of history as catastrophe is keenly felt even by mainstream Muslims, for many of whom Canada’s support of Israel is a perpetual source of bafflement. For many Muslims, Canada’s relationship with Israel is seen, rightly or wrongly, as antithetical to its stated dedication to human rights and the international rule of law.

For neo-jihadists and Islamist extremist ideologues, the relationship between Canada and Israel is proof that Canada is a “Crusader nation,” that must itself be attacked for its role in attacking Islam. Indeed, one of Osama bin Laden’s mentors and one of the intellectual engines driving the formation of al Qaeda, was Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, a Palestinian ideologue and militant who left the West Bank for Jordan and Saudi Arabia after the Six Day War. Aside from his influence on bin Laden, Azzam is also believed to have had a role in the founding of Hamas.

At this point, there has been little comment in the Canadian Muslim media about Minister Kent’s statement. From an extremist perspective, however, it does seem to confirm many closely held ideological principles and could be seen as either a provocation or a challenge. It is critical therefore, that the national security environment be monitored closely over the next few days for any signs of violence in response to Minister Kent’s statement. Clearly the Olympics (and even the small



Israeli Olympic team) are of concern, although given logistical challenges, Kent's statement would probably be more of an afterthought than a true driver in any Olympic attack. Localized violence, possibly against Jewish or Israeli targets, would be more likely.

Outside of the possibility of terrorist activity, Minister Kent's statement is likely to be of concern to many Muslim communities and constituencies in Canada. As a highly visible manifestation of the Government of Canada and its security policy, the RCMP Community Outreach Program may be challenged on it in weeks and months to come. It is critical, therefore, that all members of the Community Outreach and National Security programs be familiar with the issue.

Alternative Analysis has outlined a discussion paper on the role of the Israel / Palestine issue in the radical narrative and its implications for the RCMP and Canadian national security. The National Security program may wish Alternative Analysis to proceed with this paper.



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