

## Security concerns call for stronger immigration screening | Sergio R. Karas

By **Sergio R. Karas**

Law360 Canada (September 19, 2024, 2:29 PM EDT) -- The recent arrests of multiple suspects on terrorism-related charges are a wake-up call for Canada, highlighting an urgent need to overhaul immigration screening processes to safeguard national security and protect the public.

On July 31, 2024, the RCMP announced the arrests of Ahmed Eldidi and his son, Mostafa Eldidi, on multiple terrorism-related charges. On the same day, Global News reported that the two men, originally Egyptian nationals, were allegedly involved in facilitating terrorist activity connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The article also revealed that in June 2015, the father took part in an ISIS propaganda video where he was seen dismembering a prisoner with a sword. On Aug. 28, 2024, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the father, who became a Canadian citizen just two months before his arrest, had initially been denied a visitor visa in 2017. However, after supplying additional documents, he obtained a visitor visa in 2018 and became a permanent resident in 2021. The fact that Ahmed Eldidi was able to become a naturalized citizen, despite his violent ties to ISIS, is bewildering.



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On Sept. 6, 2024, just two months following the arrests of the Eldidis, the RCMP announced the arrest of Muhammad Shahzeb Khan for allegedly planning a deadly mass casualty attack targeting Jewish citizens in the United States. The same day this was announced, City News CP24 in Toronto reported that Khan, a Pakistani national and Canadian resident, disclosed to undercover officers his plans to execute "the largest attack on U.S. soil since 9/11" on behalf of ISIS. The horrific plan to "slaughter Jews" was set to happen on the first anniversary of Hamas's attack on Israel, Oct. 7. The RCMP and Public Safety Canada were investigating Khan's student visa, according to Global News on Sept. 8, 2024. These arrests raise serious concerns regarding how individuals with ties to terrorist organizations manage to obtain visas, eventually becoming residents of Canada. There is an obvious and urgent need to prevent these security failures.

The threat of terrorism in Canada is real and growing. Since 2014, when ISIS began calling for killings in Western countries, Canada has experienced eight attacks linked to that organization. These incidents included an attack on a Toronto Canadian Tire store, a woman who was bludgeoned to death on a sidewalk in Scarborough, a family fatally shot at a Mississauga restaurant, a passenger's throat slashed aboard a bus in Surrey, B.C., and a terror plot to attack Ottawa's Jewish community. The last two incidents occurred just last year. With increasing numbers of terrorism-related attacks and plots, Canada cannot afford to neglect the country's national and public security.

According to CBC News on May 6, 2024, the number of antisemitic incidents in Canada has more than doubled between 2022 and 2023, reaching a record high. In 2023, the number of antisemitic incidents rose to 5,791, surpassing the previous record of 2,799 in 2021. In the article, Richard Robertson, the Director of Policy and Research for the Jewish advocacy group B'nai Brith Canada, pointed out that the number of antisemitic incidents has increased further since Oct. 7, 2023.

The federal government announced on May 27, 2024, its plan to increase the number of visas under the Gaza program from 1,000 to 5,000 but has not been transparent on how it intends to screen the applicants thoroughly to ensure that they are not linked to Hamas or any other terrorist organization.

Several United States Senators have also expressed concerns about the potential for individuals with ties to terror to gain access to the United States after landing in Canada. A letter cosigned by six Senators to the United States Department of Homeland Security called for heightened security measures should any Gazans attempt to enter the United States. The letter states that "... with little to no reliable records or background checks of the individuals from Palestinian Territories, the policies unlock opportunities for individuals with ties to terrorist groups to enter Canada, receive new forms of identification, and then enter the U.S. along the porous northern border."

The United States is right to be concerned about Canada's inadequate immigration vetting processes. An internal audit of the Immigration National Security Screening Program, covering the period between 2014 and 2019, revealed that out of the 7,141 cases that were flagged due to security concerns, including war crimes, espionage and terrorism, 3,314 were approved for temporary, permanent and refugee status. That is nearly half (46 per cent) of the foreign nationals flagged by security agencies that have been allowed to take up residency in Canada. An Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada spokesperson was quoted as saying that applicants initially denied entry due to serious crimes may still be admissible if "... it is deemed that entry of this person is in Canada's interest." This is an astounding statement. How is it in "Canada's interest" to introduce potential security threats into the country?

Canada's immigration vetting process must prevent individuals with terrorist ties from entering the country. While the RCMP were able to thwart the plots of three suspects, Canada should not risk the safety of its citizens. Reforms should include more rigorous background checks involving international intelligence, enhanced scrutiny as well as limits on applicants with connections to regions occupied by extremist groups or countries that sponsor terrorism. In addition, the government should consider reinstating provisions in the *Citizenship Act* (R.S.C. 1985, c. C-29) that enabled the minister of citizenship and immigration the power to revoke citizenship from dual-citizenship holders involved in terrorist-related crimes. Subsection 10(1) of the *Citizenship Act* can be used to revoke citizenship if it was "... obtained, retained, renounced, or resumed by false representation, fraud, or knowingly concealing material circumstances." However, the language must be broader to account for terrorist activities, espionage and national security.

Canada has become a target of those who wish to do public harm, and the authorities need to wake up to that reality before it is too late.

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