

**Position Paper: Canada and ISIS, and International & Domestic Response**

A) Canada must implement a long-term strategy (decades long) to deal with ISIS:

1. Canada must recognize the long-term futility of dealing with ISIS only militarily. The 18 months of Western airstrikes on ISIS have produced seemingly little benefit: 1) ISIS still holds most of the territory it held in 2014; 2) ISIS has expanded its terror attacks into Western countries; 3) ISIS has established renegade groups outside of Syria-Iraq; and 4) ISIS continues to successfully fund its activities and attract new recruits.
2. Internationally, Canada must aggressively pursue the non-military interventions against ISIS. These interventions have been on the table since 2014, and must continue to be vigorously pursued: 1) Squeeze out ISIS' funding sources, both international donors and black market oil; 2) Crack down on ISIS' supply routes and weapons sources; 3) Address the underlying grievances of local populations; 4) Provide long-term humanitarian aid and assistance to the region; and 5) Seek a multi-lateral resolution to regional issues.
3. Domestically, Canada must work with Muslim communities to deter radicalization. Canadian Muslims are as horrified by ISIS as everyone else. They should receive assistance through: 1) government messaging which positions them as part of the solution, rather than as part of the problem; 2) relationships with law enforcement to help deter radical elements or individuals; 3) relationships with law enforcement to deter ISIS recruitment in Canada; 4) a foreign policy that recognizes the legitimate grievances of the many resistance groups in the Middle East, and Canada's sympathy with the legitimate political aspirations of many such movements.

B) Canada must address the rise of domestic Islamophobia as a result of ISIS' barbarism:

1. The messaging at all levels of government must avoid an "us" and "them" rhetoric. Such rhetoric fosters fear and distrust among non-Muslims, and creates a sense of alienation among Muslim Canadians.
2. The Federal government must condemn manifestations of Islamophobia at all levels. The Federal government must be far more engaged against Islamophobia than it has in the past. Initiatives should include a vocal denunciation of all acts of Islamophobia committed by agents of the state; a registry of hate crimes; more active legal action against anti-Muslim provocateurs.
3. The Federal government must do more to mainstream its Muslim communities. There are vibrant programs among Muslims in the West which push for full integration as "Western Muslims," and desire full engagement with their local Canadian communities. Such efforts should be encouraged and funded through wisely conceived programs.

C) Canada should distinguish between ISIS and other militant Islamist groups of the Middle East:

1. Canada should accept the credibility of Middle East Muslim groups that function as political resistance movements. Resistance movements in the Middle East often become incarnate as religious movements. Many groups, e.g. Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood in many countries, enjoy widespread popular support, have moderate elements, and seek to engage politically. Canadian policy may oppose the violence used by some groups, but could nevertheless validate the "cause" of such groups. E.g. valid concerns about a) ethnic discrimination, b) religious discrimination, c) denial of freedom,

d) denial of political expression, etc. By validating the “cause,” Canada establishes greater trust, and may be able to serve as a significant neutral broker.

2. Canada must avoid politically-motivated or counterproductive “labelling” of Muslim groups which seek to discredit or marginalize such groups. Reactionary Canadians relish in digging up decades-old documents, or finding obscure low-level leaders with anti-Semitic views. Canada is better served by listening to what the pragmatic top-level leaders of these groups are saying today.

D) Canadian policy should work to avoid the conditions that create fertile ground for the establishment of militant Islamist groups in the Middle East:

1. Canadian developmental policy must provide stick and carrot incentives for Canadian assistance and trade to ensure oppressive regimes introduce reforms progressively.
2. Canadian policy must reduce the sale of arms to the Middle East. The current Egyptian and Saudi governments are consumers of Canadian arms, yet are known for human rights abuses against their populations. This is immoral. Western arms are far too abundant in this region where military force is more often used against domestic civilian opponents rather than foreign armies.
3. Canadian developmental policy must help struggling, but potentially representative governments. Canada and the West have missed key opportunities in the past (e.g. Libya, Iraq, etc.) Today’s opportunities may be Lebanon and Tunisia.
4. Canada must oppose large Western military bases and deployments in the Middle East. A portion of the current extremism in the Middle East grows out of resentment of Western military presence in the region. Opposition groups are also resentful that Western countries seem to favour pliable governments which sacrifice local legitimacy for foreign military aid (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.)

E) Canadian policy should seek to urgently address and resolve the most important destabilizing factors in the Middle East:

1. The lack of any real representative rights in most Middle East governments. This was most definitely the problem which led to the rise of ISIS (in Iraq and Syria); other Islamic militant groups in Syria; Hamas (opposing Israel’s military occupation); the Muslim Brotherhood’s popularity in Egypt; and many other groups.
2. The lack of a peace settlement between Palestinians and Israelis. Western hypocrisy vis-à-vis the human, political and human rights situation in the Israel-Palestine conflict fuels all sorts of regional discontent and political machinations.
3. The lack of a resolution to the Kurdish aspirations of self-determination. While less discussed than other issues, the failure to address legitimate Kurdish aspirations for autonomy destabilizes Syria, Iraq and Turkey, and distorts regional politics. This is most remarkably seen in Turkey’s ambivalence to ISIS-Kurdish fighting in Iraq.
4. The Western double standard on human rights. The West does not apply a consistent standard to human rights abuses in the Middle East. Crimes against one group are ignored, while other crimes elicit billions of dollars of military involvement. And all too often, financial interests seem to be the driver of such involvement.
5. The ongoing perception of destructive Western meddling in Middle East politics. The selective military interventions by the US in recent years have only led to a deepening of local crises. The 45+ military bases that the US and others maintain in the area are also a source of consternation for many. Canadian policy should address these realities and perceptions, and should propose a different course forward.