

SECURITY

# Threat to privacy greater than terrorism, professor says

Even a small error rate in mass surveillance could falsely label thousands of Canadians as terrorists, he warns

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VANCOUVER SUN

OTTAWA — Canadians' fear of another domestic terror attack doesn't warrant the "significant" threat to Canadians' privacy posed by the Harper government's security legislation, according to a University of B.C. expert on information technology.

Terrorism is a threat everywhere, but "dying in a terror attack (in Canada) is less likely than being killed by a lightning strike," said Hasan Cavusoglu, a professor in the Sauder School of Business' management information systems division.

Environment Canada says an average of 10 Canadians die annually from lightning strikes, whereas two — up from zero most years — died on Canadian soil in 2014 as a result of terrorism. That tiny terror risk has to be weighed against the sweeping threat to Canadians posed by the Security of Canada Information Sharing Act, which is a component of C-51, Cavusoglu said.

The act allows security officers to collect personal information from 17 different government institutions, including the Canada Revenue Agency, Citizenship and Immigration, and Health Canada, in order to investigate "activities that undermine the security of Canada."

Cavusoglu, echoing the official position of Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien, warned that this provision opens the door to a "Big Data" surveillance system watching all Canadians.

"The legislation allows the government to get information to deal with a threat to the 'security of Canada,' which is a really big term," he said in an interview Wednesday. "In order to reach that objective, they will be able to get information about all



Hasan Cavusoglu, a professor and expert on information technology at UBC, says terrorism threats in Canada don't justify Bill C-51 measures.

“They will be able to get information about all citizens in order to detect a few suspected terrorists.”

HASAN CAVUSOGLU

citizens in order to detect a few suspected terrorists."

Cavusoglu said investigators could ultimately mine data relating to phone call records, Internet use, travel and education history, tax information — "anything and everything about everyone can be potentially looked into."

The UBC professor drew up a hypothetical scenario in which there are perhaps 500 individuals in Canada involved in some sort of terrorist activity, out of a population of 25 million being data-mined. (The population in January was 35.7 million, according to Statistics Canada, but Cavusoglu said children and older seniors would likely be weeded out.)

He then assumed that whatever system is developed to detect terrorists would have a one per cent error rate, which would apply to both "false negatives" — failing to detect an actual terrorist — and "false positives" — erroneously determining that a non-terrorist is in fact a terrorist.

"That means that the system will miss five terrorists. But, it

also labels 250,000 people as potential terrorists," he said. "The latter will cause a lot of inconvenience for ordinary citizens who have nothing to do with terrorism. Their rights will be potentially violated as a result of labelling them as potential terrorists."

Cavusoglu was particularly critical of the bill's lack of an oversight system to ensure Bill C-51's new powers for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the RCMP aren't abused, and criticized the government for not allowing Canada's privacy commissioner to testify before a Conservative-dominated parliamentary committee.

"While the potential to know virtually everything about everyone may well identify some new threats, the loss of privacy is clearly excessive," Therrien said in a written submission to the committee studying the bill earlier this month.

"All Canadians would be caught in this web."

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## P.E.I. student linked to terrorism probe 'a typical guy'

Two different pictures emerged Wednesday of a Prince Edward Island university student who is the target of a national security probe.

In the eyes of the Mounties, Seyed Amir Hossein Raisolsadat was on the verge of committing a terrorism offence, which is why they say they made the rare move of asking for a peace bond to limit his movements.

But friends and acquaintances chalk it up to one big misunderstanding, saying that Raisolsadat, 20, is a smart young man from a good-mannered family and not capable of violence.

The RCMP would not divulge how Raisolsadat came to the attention of police, or what activities they suspect he was involved in. But it appears that the investigation has been in motion for a while.

A friend, who went to Colonel Gray High School with Raisolsadat and asked not to be identified, said police came to him about a year ago to ask questions about Raisolsadat.

The friend said Raisolsadat gets good grades and has a passion for chemistry. He can be a bit of a braggart at times, someone who likes to "act tough" and talk politics. "But he's not a military person, he's not a terrorist — just a typical guy," the friend said.

The RCMP arrested Raisolsadat on Tuesday after a peace bond was issued. Court documents show the RCMP swore an affidavit before a judge saying it has reasonable grounds to believe Raisolsadat will commit a terrorism offence. He was released the same day on condition that he remain in the province, abstain from possessing a firearm and report weekly to RCMP headquarters in Charlottetown. He is due



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RCMP asked for a peace bond to limit the movements of university student Seyed Amir Hossein Raisolsadat.

back in court on April 20.

"Peace bonds are meant to be a more flexible tool so that you don't end up putting someone behind bars who shouldn't be put behind bars," said Wesley Wark, a professor at the University of Ottawa and national security expert. "There will be cases where you have reasonable grounds to suspect a person might engage in terrorism, but you don't have all the evidence to bring to court to lead to a successful conviction."

The Conservative government's latest anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-51, would make it easier for police to obtain peace bonds.

Raisolsadat's LinkedIn profile says he is studying chemistry at the University of Prince Edward Island. University officials wouldn't comment Wednesday, but did release a letter sent to all faculty informing them of media reports linking a student to a police investigation.

"At this time, UPEI has not been contacted by any law enforcement agencies about this matter," said the letter from Christian Lacroix, vice-president academic.

Douglas Quan, National Post  
With files from The Canadian Press