

Galloway a victim of Canada's baffling approach to fighting terror

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"Come out and debate with me like a man," the old bruiser shouted over the video-link to Toronto. "Let's book the biggest hall in Canada and you and I will debate these issues of war and peace and freedom of speech and censorship... If we don't achieve a political settlement (in the Middle East), we're in for war. If there's no justice, there will be no peace for Palestine."

It was, of course, the old scallywag himself, George Galloway, fuming about the Canadian Immigration Minister James Kenney's refusal to allow him to speak in Canada on the grounds that he - Galloway - was involved in "terrorism". The Scottish-born MP was talking from an important centre of "world terror" - New York City.

Mr Kenney's spokesman, Alikhan Velshi, last week compared Mr Galloway to Oliver Cromwell and said he would not be allowed to enter Canada. Self-publicist, friend of dictators, reality TV show performer and general silly ass Mr Galloway may be. But he has no more in common with Cromwell than the minister has with Ghengis Khan.

But this is no laughing matter. How could the Canadian embassy in London have believed Mr Galloway's food and medicine shipment to Gaza, made with Israel's agreement, and its delivery to the Hamas government was a "terrorist" act, even if Stephen Harper's Canadian government regards Hamas as a "terrorist organisation".

Mr Galloway wasn't shipping guns and is touring the US with his anti-war, pro-Palestinian, non-terrorist speeches. "It's just not credible, Mr Kenney," Mr Galloway shouted, "to call a man touring the United States, playing to packed audiences... a terrorist or a security threat."

Quite so. After all, the US has lost thousands of soldiers in its "war on terror" in the Middle East. Canada's army in Afghanistan comprises barely 2,000 and has suffered fewer than 120 military casualties.

Only a Canadian Jewish organisation agreed with Mr Galloway's exclusion; one paper here suggested this might have prompted the ban. The right-wing *National Post* came out against the exclusion, though only because a "future left-wing Canadian government" might ban Israeli or US speakers.

But there's a bigger issue. Canada helped the US send an innocent Canadian citizen, Mahar Arar, to "rendition" in Syria, where he was savagely tortured. Only a few days ago, another Canadian Muslim told me how he was whipped with steel cables in Damascus as his torturers read out questions from the Canadian embassy. Yet another Canadian Muslim citizen, Abousfian Abdelrazik, has been living in the reception of the US embassy in Khartoum for 10 months after Canadian agents asked the enormously democratic Sudanese government to imprison him for terrorism. Now the government won't let him come home unless he's taken off not a Canadian, but a UN "terrorist" list. Cromwellian isn't the word for it. But the mystery is this: how did so many millions of decent Canadians come to be ruled by such a weird government?

P.S.

* From The Independent on Sunday, Wednesday, 1 April 2009:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinio...>