For almost four years the United States and other imperialist governments have been actively engaged in a bloody campaign to overthrow the government of Syria. They have been limited so far to imposing a cruel civil war upon the country by pumping it full of anti-gov

e enment mercenaries. Throughout this entire time they have been constantly searching for an excuse to justify a full scale military intervention. Now they think they finally have one in a so-called "the war against ISIS/ISIL".

More than 190,000 people have been killed and 22 million displaced because of the installed civil war in Syria. Within this flevy chaos also emerged the armed group ISIS/ISIL. Nobody benefited more from the hyper-injection of foreign military aid and funding than they did, and thanks to the vacuum of power created in war torn areas, they also expanded across Syria and moved into Iraq.

Never ones to miss an opportunity to justify increased war and occupation, the US used this as a justification to re-escalate their occupation of Iraq through hundreds of air strikes and an expanded military presence. The Canadian military joined the war drive by sending almost 700 soldiers, six CF-18 warplanes, two surveillance aircraft and an air-to-air tanker. The first six months of the Canadian mission alone will cost taxpayers 166 million dollars. This is despite repeated demands by Iraqis that all foreign troops leave the country immediately.

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The US is already again since September 11, 2001. They have been used by the US and other imperialist countries to try and justify their wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Libya, Mali and beyond. In Afghanistan it was the Taliban, which they also created. In Iraq it was a weapons of mass destruction, which never existed! Now in a decade later and millions of people dead and displaced by these wars, they want us to once again rise up to demand an end to imperialist war and occupation!
The bill makes criminals of people who supposedly promote terrorism but who have never committed nor plan to commit a criminal or violent act. It is already illegal to counsel or actively encourage someone to commit a specific terrorism offence. Bill C-51 would broaden that list of offences. No reason exists to expand the powers of the criminal law.

As the world joins in solidarity to stand firm on the democratic necessity of free speech, Bill C-51 has announced its plans to criminalize words and sentiments in the misguided notion that this will make us safer. We will not be safer. We will be less free, less safe, and less likely to know who to keep an eye on, because the people we might be concerned about won’t be discussing their troubling views.

This bill could also make a criminal out of anyone who, for one reason or another, spouts off on social media in support of some awful violent event or another, whether in Canada or abroad — even if that individual has neither committed nor planned any criminal action. Simply saying that you support whatever happened would be enough to make you a criminal. As reprehensible as it might be to make statements in support of violence, it should not be a crime just to sit at home and write about it on Facebook without any intention to act violently or to incite others.

Moreover, the breadth of Bill C-51’s definition of terrorism and jeopardizing the security of Canada allows for a significant chill on legitimate political speech. It seems highly likely to the BCCLA that this aspect of the bill is unconstitutional.

The bill repeats the mistakes of history. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) was created in the early 1980s after an inquiry into the illegal activities and civil rights abuses of the RCMP, which originally also acted as Canada’s intelligence-gathering service. The RCMP at the time was engaged in repeated lawbreaking as it tried to interfere with the activities of groups that it targeted — for example, the Quebec avant-garde. This kind of undemocratic activity was so shocking that a commission of inquiry recommended that the power to conduct espionage and intelligence gathering be taken away from the RCMP and that policing and intelligence gathering be separated in order to prevent future foul play by Canadians spies. Now, CSIS is being given this new police-like power to “disrupt” the activities of suspected terrorists, instead of leaving those powers in the hands of police, without extending additional appropriate supervision and oversight to CSIS in exercising this new authority. While warrants will be required for disruption activities, there remains a significant problem in that CSIS’s oversight mechanism is ill-equipped to properly review the agency’s growing mandate.

Let us be clear: the government has presented absolutely no policy rationale, nor any evidence, to demonstrate why CSIS’s mandate should be expanded. After much study and an entire commission of inquiry, much controversy, and the hard lessons of serious law-breaking and abuses committed in the name of “national security,” Canada decided to appropriately contain the powers of the newly created CSIS. This was deliberate. Now, the government seeks to up-end the approach of necessary constraint and license a de facto “secret police” with a minimum of public discussion. The BCCLA opposes this wholesale expansion of power, and there is no demonstrated need for them and a demonstrated history of their abuse.

As Canadians learn more through last week’s Snowden revelations about Canada’s activities in this area of spying, we know that what we need is transparency and accountability in the use of CSIS and CSEC’s existing extraordinary powers. Instead, the government wants to give our spy agencies unprecedented new powers, without doing anything about the shameful lack of oversight of our national security agencies. As we have been saying for years, and as we argue in our lawsuit against Canada’s mass online surveillance activities, the public interest – and the protection of the rights of Canadians – demands that Canada’s spy agencies have strong oversight mechanisms. We expect to provide more detailed analysis of Bill C-51 as this debate continues. However, we are confident in results of this Bill that the unprecedented expansion of national security powers is not sound security policy and presents a real danger to Canadians.