

## French handwriting evidence against Diab flawed: expert

BY CHRIS COBB, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN    DECEMBER 13, 2010



In this file photo, Hassan Diab (C) smiles as he is greeted by supporters outside the Ottawa Courthouse on Elgin St. as he begins the extradition hearing for a Paris synagogue bombing he is accused of participating in which took place in 1980.

**Photograph by:** Wayne Cuddington, Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — Pivotal French handwriting evidence, potentially key to the fate of alleged terrorist Hassan Diab, is the seriously flawed work of an ill-qualified analyst, a former RCMP forensic document examiner told Diab's extradition hearing Monday.

In a scathing criticism of the French evidence, Brian Lindblom said the handwriting analysis contained "assumption and speculation" and was produced by an analyst who has no internationally recognized qualifications in the field and little, if any, training.

"Lindblom said he was "shocked" by some of the conclusions reached by French analyst Anne Bisotti.

"Ms. Bisotti's report is often confusing and incomprehensible," said Lindblom, now a consultant who works internationally. "I find her opinions to be patently unreliable and, for the most part, not supported even by her own observations."

The French want former University of Ottawa professor Diab extradited to stand trial for the murder of

four passersby who were killed in a terrorist bomb blast 30 years ago outside the Rue Copernic synagogue in central Paris. More than 40 others were injured.

Evidence from witnesses questioned shortly after the bombing strongly suggests that the man who signed into a Paris hotel using the false name Alexander Panadriyu was also the person who planted the bomb in a motorcycle saddlebag outside the synagogue.

Police compared that signature and other writing with Diab's writing on mid-1990s United States government documents — he was a student at Syracuse University in New York state — and it is those comparisons that are the centre of the handwriting analysis argument.

Lindblom, who was retained by defence lawyer Donald Bayne, said the 15-year time span between the two samples of handwriting is problematic.

In her report, Bisotti says that the 15-year lapse would produce negligible changes in a person's handwriting — an assertion that Lindblom called "at best, a generalization.

"How could Ms. Bisotti know what did or did not occur in Mr. Diab's handwriting over the course of 15 years?" he wrote in a report also submitted as evidence. "There are many writers who see a deterioration in penmanship and legibility in their intermediate years. This could result from the need to produce large volumes of handwriting in a hurried fashion. A more recent phenomenon is the depreciation in writing skill coinciding with the advent of computer use."

Bisotti, he said, had used a "numbers game" in analyzing the handwriting and is essentially reporting that there are more similarities than differences in the samples. Therefore, they must both have been written by Diab.

"Evaluating similarities and differences is not just a matter of counting them up," he said. "Many noted authorities have written on this subject. They all stress that differences, even though small in number, carry much greater significance and often outweigh abundant similarities."

The veteran Canadian analyst also criticized the mandate Bisotti received from French prosecutor Marc Trevidic, who launched the extradition proceedings against Diab.

"At no point does Mr. Trevidic request an opinion as to whether Hassan Diab may not be the writer of the signature and handwriting," added Lindblom. "Rather his instruction is to determine if he (Diab) is certainly or may be the writer. There appears to be no room for an objective consideration of the possibility that the author of the sample material may not be the writer; he is presumed to be the writer."

Trevidic's mandate is effectively telling Bisotti what to say, added Lindblom.

Bisotti's handwriting analysis is the third sent to Canada by the French. The evidence of two previous experts was withdrawn following defence criticism.

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