



NATIONAL SECURITY & EMERGING THREATS TO THE WEST COAST

Date: February 21, 2019

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented throughout the evening and does not exclusively represent the views of the speaker or the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On February 21st, 2019, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies hosted its twelfth roundtable focusing on “National Security & Emerging Threats to the West Coast.” The presentation was hosted by Inspector Benoit Maure, a serving Peace Officer for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with over 30 years of police experience. Inspector Maure highlighted various emerging and continuing terror threats in British Columbia, highlighting their similarities to other global issues. He discussed the history of terror threats in British Columbia (BC) and the role of symbolic targets in terrorism. The following roundtable discussion centred on a case study describing the Yellow Vest Canada movement and its proclivity toward soft violence. Audience members then brought into question whether or not the media downplays soft violence and if this arguable disposition places Canadians into instances where it may be difficult to detect escalation of groups approaching hard violence.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

The presentation established what an emerging threat was and discussed whether BC was “immune” to a potential terrorist attack. Thereafter, BC was examined as a place where relaxed laws could possibly have permitted the rise of different extremist groups and their actions internationally and domestically. Finally, the presentation covered forecasts for the future in which information technology may be the centre of future terrorist attacks due to its centralized link to other critical infrastructure sectors.

Roundtable

The roundtable focused on the normalization of soft violence by Canadian media and the effects it would have on emerging threats. Discussion centred around information technology as the core of critical infrastructure and that soft violence can take form through Denial of Service Attacks (DDoS). Audience members also discussed the normalization of radical behaviour and hate in the media.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Inspector Maure began the presentation by citing that BC is not immune to a terrorist attack and that several have occurred such as the Air India Bombing in the 1980's. Due to BC's arguably relaxed laws surrounding terrorism, individuals could arrive here to take advantage of such. However, it is important to note that the "intention to intimidate" is what changes a hate crime to terrorism, as well, targets for terrorist attacks are arguably changing.

BC has a history of incidents such as environmental extremism, animal rights activism, and politically radical activities. Several examples of individuals arriving to Canada with the intention of raising funds for terrorist activities were discussed. A popular example is Praphanaran Thambilurai, who was selling posters door-to-door to raise money for international terror organizations. Maure highlights that when you raise funds in Canada for an outside terrorist group, you can be charged criminally. However, it is difficult to track if the channel is a legal fundraiser. Furthermore, for these individuals, it could be argued that mental health is beginning to play a larger role in the relaxation of laws, as rehabilitation is becoming a topic of discussion. BC's laws are relaxed arguably because of the need to provide intent to intimidate in order to charge them with terrorist attacks. In the BC Legislature plot, both individuals involved were experiencing issues with upbringing and mental health; therefore, arguably leading to them expressing extremist views.

Maure discussed at length the notion of "the intent to intimidate" in terms of political, religious, and ideological views. It is argued that when the intent to intimidate is present in the situation, it may escalate from a hate crime to a terrorist act. He uses the example of environmental extremism in BC, as it is not designed to intimidate, but rather demonstrate. This distinction is also a means to differentiate soft and hard violence.

Targets for terrorist attacks may centre around critical infrastructure, such as power plants, dams, banks, and hospitals. Such infrastructures are difficult to protect because ~85% of them are privately owned. When intentionally attacked, the effects can be devastating because of the consequences that come with losing these critical infrastructures. Lastly, Maure highlighted the importance of information technology (IT) and the effects on all other forms of critical infrastructure. As IT acts as the central hub for communications, the potential for failure leaves other critical infrastructure at constant risk of attack because rather than one sector being affected, all sectors can rapidly be attacked.

Roundtable

Audience members posed questions to Maure which ranged from specific cases of countries dealing with terrorist activities, to the changing of targets, and finally, the rise of new threats.

Maure pointed out that while new threats with technology are on the horizon, similar things that have happened in the past with symbolic attacks are just as likely to occur now. This led into the discussion surrounding attack prediction, where Maure stipulated that intelligence agencies are able to tell only afterward if an escalation to hard violence has occurred.

Case Study

Despite BC's crime rate falling for the second consecutive year, the argument can be made that soft violence is rising. For example, movements like the Yellow Vest Canada group protest against government policy with rallies occurring weekly. Soft violence could become a hallmark of their protest actions. Media outlets have arguably lacked adequate coverage of soft violence, with interviews in news outlets portraying the movements sympathetically, failing to address the potential public safety threats that could occur. Discussion centred on the normalization of soft violence by the media, stating that because soft violence fails to break conventional understandings of law, it isn't covered the same as hard violence would be. Audience members discussed denial of service attacks as hard violence, because while there isn't a kinetic impact between individuals, the effect is still malicious in nature. Furthermore, audience members discussed the spectrum of motivation that softens views of these groups. It may happen where alt-right groups could use harmless groups as such to hide violence used for their own purposes. Canadians also share a degree of sympathy for groups such as Yellow Vests Canada given that many Canadians may agree with some portions of the movement.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION AND WEST COAST PERSPECTIVES

Presentation

- Critical infrastructure arguably remains a major terror target in BC with frameworks like pipelines being potential targets.
- Symbolic attacks, such as targeted scares at sporting events, remain a new tactic in order to disrupt Canadian life.
- BC's relaxed laws may establish a place for the cultivation of activism surrounding social issues and the environment.
- Information technology is a major target for terror attack because of its centralized nature.

Roundtable

- Media outlets in BC have provided inadequate coverage of soft violence by groups such as Yellow Vest Canada.
- Hate is being normalized in speech and Canadian citizens are becoming indifferent to these sorts of topics.
- Canadians are hesitant to denounce these groups due to similar views they share with these groups.



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