Right-Wing Extremism Elements in the Canadian Armed Forces
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PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this briefing note is to examine the alleged presence of right-wing extremism (RWE) within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), with particular reference to Corporal Patrik Mathews and RWE group, known as "The Base".

SECURITY PROBLEM

The potential infiltration of CAF by individuals holding RWE views could pose a national security threat if these individuals use CAF as their modus operandi to obtain training and skills to both enhance tactical and kinetic capabilities of the RWE collective, and disseminate their knowledge to other individuals within their collective and the great movement itself.

BACKGROUND and KEY FACTS

Master Corporal Patrik Mathews was relieved of his duties as a CAF reservist for his alleged ties to a neo-Nazi group, The Base, and for allegdly attempting to recruit fellow reservists (Hirschfield, 2019). As of the date of this publication, he has been reported as missing, his truck has been found abandoned near the U.S.-Canada border, and there is a strong likelihood he may be in the U.S. due to a pattern of frequent trips across the border (Breen & Russell, 2019; Jackson & Stephensen, 2019). RCMP seized a number of firearms from Mathews' home which may be some indication that he was planning to use them (Hirschfeld, 2019). Matthews was a combat engineer which would indicate that he received rudimentary explosives training and had reportedly participated in exercises involving the use of explosives and demolition (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019). Canadian border agents allegedly found "racist material" in Mathews' truck during one of his trips into the U.S. which prompted a covert military intelligence investigation (Jackson & Stephenson, 2019). Mathews has allegedly made frequent trips into the U.S in the past, however, the purpose of these trips and who he may have been meeting with is unknown.

The possible presence of RWE in CAF has the potential to be a serious national security threat, due to the potential for CAF members using their combat experience and weapons training to carry out violent attacks against Canadians, acting as part of a Violent Transnational Social Movement (VTSM). As well as the potential to negatively impact the combat effectiveness and operational readiness of the CAF. Conflict caused by racial, religious, or political tensions negatively influences communication, disrupts good order and service, and may weaken interpersonal bonds and unit cohesion. This may create a rift between members and result in a threat to the effectiveness of CAF (Veilleux-Lepage, 2019).

It can be argued that the threat to society posed by the RWE movement is increasing due to military and specialized tactics training obtained by recruiting individuals with military skills and experience. These individuals are reportedly targeted for their expertise, which can provide structure and knowledge to these collectives (Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2019, p. 7). Furthermore, these military skills can be disseminated to members within their own collective or other RWE collectives.

The Base is a RWE collective whose members are predominantly American, Canadian, and European. VTSM groups, such as The Base are segmentary in nature, meaning the group is held together through a shared bond, belief, and formation of their own identity (Kelshall, 2018, p.29). It is also reticulate, meaning it is part of a larger network which embodies its own doctrine. These groups resemble a network where one group is connected to another through their social bond (Kelshall, 2018, p.24). They are a decentralized group actively seeking to create small cells, which are superficially similar to, but erroneously classified as terrorist cells. This assessment is based on the fact that these cells have been observed to be poly-centric, rather than hierarchical in nature. Along with being segmentary, reticulate and driven by identity-based motives, rather than political motives. Therefore, groups such as The Base can be instead be identified as a VTSM (Thorpe, 2019). A VTSM can be defined as a social movement which transcends physical state boundaries to address perceived threats against an identity to which they hold (Kelshall, 2018, p. 27-28).[1]

It has been reported that members of The Base are influenced by the writing of James Mason - an American neo-Nazi - and hold anti-semetic, racist, misogynistic and homophobic views (Thorpe, 2019). Their rhetoric calls for a race war, supports mass attacks with a high body count, and idolizes individuals who have committed mass casualty shootings or bombings (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019; Thorpe, 2019). They have allegedly put up flyers to intimidate and threaten anti-fascist activists and recruit new members from CAF (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019; Thorpe, 2019). It has been reported that they conduct paramilitary training in unknown camps on private property, and that Canadian members may have crossed into the US to attend camps, but there may be training camps in Canada as well (Thorpe, 2019). Through an online database, the Base disseminates military tactics and guides to creating and using weapons of mass destruction. More recently, the group has been accused of planning to attack critical infrastructure, such as public water systems and nuclear power plants which arguably solidifies their violent nature (Thorpe, 2019).

[1] For more information about VTSMs, refer to the following: "A Brief History of Social Movements in North America" by the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies - Vancouver, "Violent Transnational Social Movements and their Impact on Contemporary Social Conflict" by C. M. Kelshall, and "Cultural Grid Assessment Tool" by the Canadian Centre for Identity-Based Conflict.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

With the Base calling for mass casualty attacks to incite others to commit further attacks, the idolization of mass shooters such as Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, and the adoption of military tactics and training by RWE collectives arguably heightens the potential threat to Canadian national security.

This problem is arguably more applicable to reservists than regular forces members. There are no time commitments that would prevent reservists from leaving the CAF shortly after receiving their military training. Furthermore, forces members are advised to uphold a neutral stance on politics and public opinion when deployed or on duty, so as not to discredit CAF or its members (CBC, 2017). Openly engaging with controversial views goes against CAF's code of ethics and values, and may negatively impact the career advancement opportunities of regular force members.[2] This would be less of a concern for an individual employed part-time and with ulterior motives.

It could be argued that the RCMP and CAF face challenges in investigating and addressing the threat of RWE given their understanding of these collectives as isolated groups rather than components of a larger movement. Given the segmentary nature of RWE, the use of the terrorist entity designation is arguably ineffective in dealing with collectives that regularly dissolve and reform under new names. Furthermore, the RCMP does not have a mandate to investigate social movements unless there are clear criminal actions involved.

It can be further argued that CAF has been reactive, not proactive in responding to RWE. It has been reported that at least six RWE collectives have been linked to CAF: Proud Boys, Atomwaffen Division, La Meute, Hammerskins Nation, III% and Soldiers of Odin (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019). It can be argued that there is a trend where only after attention from the media have significant disciplinary actions been taken. For example, CAF members operating Fireforce Ventures were originally found to not be violating the CAF code of conduct. They were suspended after media brought attention to a podcast and social media postings which used hate speech (Cox & Seatter, 2019). A 2018 Report by Military Police Criminal Intelligence Section claimed hate groups "do not pose a significant threat to CAF/DND" (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019). Furthermore, the report claims that less than 0.1% of individuals have been identified as having hate-group connections or views (Lamoureaux & Makuch, 2019) yet the incident suggests that it is possible for the presence of these hate groups to continue to infiltrate CAF and pose a violent threat.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES TO BE CONSIDERED

[2] For more information about the Canadian Armed Forces code of ethics and values, see the *Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces.*

- Military recruiters may not be sufficiently informed on RWE in order to differentiate between nationalistic values and extremist values during the CAF screening process.
- There are alternative methods for private individuals to obtain combat relevant skills through companies offering such training. Such training courses may be targeted towards security professionals who may be operating in a high risk environment or a hobbyist seeking to develop such skills without the intent of utilizing them in an offensive combat scenario. Such as individuals engaged in competition or recreational shooting sports.

WHAT IS NOT KNOWN

- The extent of RWE influence within the CAF. To what extent is this an isolated incident or an underreported/undetected trend.
- The nature of the “racist material” found in Mathew’s vehicle found during a border search of his vehicle.
- The effectiveness of Mathews' recruiting efforts. To what extent was Mathews' able to influence his fellow soldiers to be sympathetic to or outright support RWE movements.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop counter narrative programs to address extremism within the CAF and to assist in preventing the radicalization of any current and former members.
- Identify the extent of RWE influences currently within the CAF.
- Ensure CAF recruiters possess a thorough understanding of RWE to identify these views during recruitment and more effectively screen and flag applicants, who may hold extremist views.

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