

Canada's military spied on mass protests against police murder of George Floyd

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A recently leaked Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) document shows that Canada's military gathered intelligence on the mass protests that erupted in Ontario in late May and early June 2020 in response to the police murder of George Floyd,

This revelation underscores that the federal Liberal government's much trumpeted deployment of the armed forces during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was not primarily motivated by "humanitarian" concerns. Rather its principal purposes were to prepare for potential social unrest, including by testing out methods of repression against the population, and to bolster the public image of the military to generate support for rearmament and Canadian imperialism's foreign interventions and wars.

The surveillance operation was carried out by the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC). The CJOC leads most military operations within Canada and around the world, as it is responsible for directing all CAF operations except those run by the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and NORAD. The CJOC collected information on the Ontario demonstrations and the individuals who took part in them, mining social media accounts to identify so-called "major actors" and gathering information on the organizational practices of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other groups.

The latest revelations make clear that Canada's military-intelligence apparatus increasingly functions as a law unto itself, not just in its operations abroad but also at home. Canada's military-intelligence agencies—which include the CAF, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and RCMP—have been implicated in many of imperialism's greatest crimes over the past two decades, from the US-led destruction of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, to extrajudicial detentions and torture, and the deploying and staffing of a global surveillance network that targets the world's population.

The news that the military surveilled peaceful protests follows on from last August's report that the CAF sought to

use techniques it had developed during its decade-long involvement in the neocolonial war in Afghanistan to "shape" public opinion in Canada during the pandemic's first wave. This included plans to broadcast government propaganda, carry out "assessments" of the potential for civil unrest in cities across the country and enlist the support of community leaders.

The Department of National Defence (DND) responded to the exposure of its spying on the George Floyd protests by issuing a statement that claimed it had gathered intelligence with the aim of increasing the military's "understanding of the local environment," and that this was necessary under conditions of their deployment to long-term care facilities in Ontario.

"In order," claimed the DND statement, "to ensure the movement of our personnel/vehicles to support Ontario LTCF (Long Term Care Facilities) would not interfere with BLM solidarity activities, preliminary research was undertaken.

"To be clear," it continued, "this work was only done with the intent to avoid disruption to both planned BLM activities and CAF operations."

This stretches credulity, to say the least. The federal government agreed to send troops to the Quebec and Ontario long-term care homes hardest hit by the pandemic in late April 2020, and they arrived in early May 2020. The deployment was aimed at fostering the public perception that Canada's governments were acting decisively to deal with the catastrophic situation in Quebec's and Ontario's long-term care facilities, so as to provide political cover for their homicidal push for a precipitous reopening of the economy and schools.

The first protests in response to George Floyd's murder occurred in Ontario on May 30 in Toronto and May 31 in Sudbury and Windsor. The majority of the province's protests, however, occurred between June 5 and 7, at which point troops had been present in Ontario's LTCFs for almost a month.

The military's own documents concede the protests were

entirely peaceful. Moreover, in the highly unlikely event that any of the protests had somehow impeded the movements of the few hundred CAF personnel deployed to Ontario's seven hardest hit LTCFs, it would have been the responsibility of local police to deal with the matter, not the armed forces.

One section in the leaked CAF intelligence report is titled "Hostile Foreign Actors" and has otherwise been completely redacted. This title alone is evidence that the intelligence gathering was not simply part of a well-meaning effort to avoid a clumsy interaction between troops and those marching in opposition to police violence and racism.

The document noted that the protests were supported by "anti-capitalism and social justice organizations," unions, and antiracism groups, particularly from indigenous communities. The report also noted the participation of celebrities and "politicians at all levels," including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan, both of whom attended the June 5 protest in Ottawa.

Military intelligence officers also tracked content relating to the protests on social media websites to pinpoint the "core narratives" surrounding the demonstrations and mined the social media accounts of individuals to gather information. A timeline was produced of every protest that took place within Ontario.

"Protests for social reform after police-involved deaths of George Floyd in Minnesota and Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto continue to gain traction in Ontario," the intelligence report notes.

Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a 29-year-old black-indigenous-Ukrainian Canadian woman, died on May 27, 2020 after allegedly falling from her 24th floor balcony while police were present in her Toronto home. Korchinski-Paquet's family continues to dispute the police version of events and seek further inquiry into what happened. Many Canadians protested her death along with Floyd's murder.

The Canadian Joint Operations Command's gathering of this information amounts to spying and is a threat to the population's fundamental, constitutionally protected right to voice their views through protests and mass demonstrations. It was an egregious assault on civil rights and should be acknowledged as such, no matter what excuses the CAF may concoct in the future to further explain away the situation.

The fact that a CAF operation allegedly intended to alleviate the mass suffering and death ravaging the country's vulnerable care-facility population was brazenly exploited as an opportunity to spy on the public speaks volumes of the true purpose and intent of a military that is so often characterized as being more humanitarian and less predatory than that of its neighbour to the south.

However, it is hardly surprising. As the *World Socialist*

Web Site has previously noted, in March 2020, at the very beginning of the pandemic, the CAF announced that it was deploying fully one-quarter of its personnel to a special anti-COVID-19 force and that these troops were being placed on a "war footing" in preparation for a possible "worst case scenario," that according to the CBC, included "public disturbances."

In response to the attempts of the CAF and Liberal government to cover up the significance of the earlier revelation that the military was mounting "information operations" based on techniques developed during the Afghan war, the *WSWS*, wrote: "If these statements are true, they raise a host of questions, all of which are carefully avoided in the accounts of the military's activities provided so far. Does the military have a free hand to conduct whatever operations it deems fit within Canada without government authorization? If the government had no idea about the military's plan, who took the decision to deploy soldiers in accordance with the 'information operations' plan? Did the 'worst-case scenario' that purportedly informed the operation include plans for the military to assume any government functions in the event of the breakdown of 'law and order,' and, if so, which ones and under whose authority?" (See: **Bringing Afghanistan home: Canada's military launched operation to "shape" opinion amid pandemic**)

Ottawa Citizen defence correspondent David Pugliese broke both stories after obtaining leaked documents, and in both cases their only substantial coverage in the corporate media was provided by Pugliese or by other journalists at the *Citizen*.

According to the *Citizen*, "some senior military public affairs officers" have not been "happy" with its exposés and "at an Oct. 29, 2020 meeting, one of those officers suggested striking back at" the newspaper, "although details weren't discussed about how that might happen."



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