

Project Hendon Inception & Lead Up to Freedom Movement

Between December 2019 and February 2020, POIB saw indicators of a massive increase in dissent and protest being illustrated through criminal activity that presented as public order events. These public order threats posed significant impact to public safety, critical infrastructure and economic security. This ideologically motivated criminal extremism was expressed primarily against rail both actually (through blockades and acts of sabotage) and symbolically as it represented a means by which the country could be economically crippled and wide spread civil unrest could ensue. The "Shutdown Canada" movement sprung from Indigenous solidarity, climate, and social justice affinity groups, attracting support from anarchist collectives as well. At the height of organizing, experiences included Wet'suwet'en solidarity events in Ontario, the protracted Tyendinaga rail blockade, the Six Nations and Caledonia blockades, and a number of rail sabotage incidents. POIB responded to these events by organizing and hosting teleconferences with intelligence members from partner agencies and affected stakeholders, as well producing daily strategic intelligence reports. Witnessing the longevity and impact of these events - targeting rail lines, highways, rolling blockades, and the included use of heavy equipment to threaten pipelines - POIB then created Project Hendon to address this issue. Hendon became a broad-based Joint Force Operations to communicate our concerns, share information and broaden collection from across a broad array of actors. POIB produced a Collection Plan and Business Rules. At this time, recipients of Hendon products spanned from Vancouver Police Service to Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) with several RCMP facets represented as well. The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the threat environment with Hendon pivoting to match the landscape and fulfilling a mandate to provide situational awareness of ideologically driven social protest and public order events.

In 2021, the experience of the COVID 19 public health crisis saw an increase in a different form of anti-authoritarian, anti-government activity. Protest activity centered on anti-lockdown and anti-mask policies and included narratives of government overreach expressed through a veil of public health driven responses that were said incur violations of the Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At this time, POIB observed increased political polarization within the fabric of society which was reflected both in Canada and the United States and appeared to be timed with the US Presidential inauguration. The distribution of Hendon reports was expanded to include a number of Ontario Chiefs of Police (Ottawa Police Service among them), on 21 January 2021. Teleconferences were hosted on a semi-regular basis with off-schedule calls arranged on short notice if needed and in response to the protest environment. Ongoing social protest activity conveyed as opposition to COVID-19 public health driven restrictions continued building anti-government narratives that began to incorporate more concerning rhetoric. Throughout the spring of 2021, POIB identified indicators of extremist elements within the anti-lockdown, anti-mask, ergo "anti-government movement". These extremist elements were principally aligned to sovereign citizen ideals, ethno-nationalism, and wide-spread conspiracy theories – theories which notably took in COVID-19 denialism, "plandemic" phraseology, and features of QAnon rhetoric. Further, Hendon reporting expressed a concern for where these extremist ideologies could emerge and manifest more forcefully during times of social stress leading to organized or inspired mobilizations to 'act'. By August 2021, the collection plan included intelligence requirements specific to hate/bias motivated indicators as a means of response to both what was reflected in Hendon reporting and the 37% national increase in police reported hate/bias crime. In the autumn of 2021, the balance of the Hendon report was dedicated to what was fairly established as the Patriot Movement (Freedom Movement), and identified sub-sect known as the Plaid Army.

Galvanizing of the Freedom Movement & Convoy 2022 Formation

The national "Freedom" movement evolved from grassroots organizing and remains largely decentralized. There is a footprint in nearly every geographic community and every sector of society: trades,

professional, healthcare, government, law enforcement, and the like. The duration and uncertainty of the pandemic, with its undulating waves of lockdowns, steps forward then backwards, combined with the varying perceptions of success and failure with respect to the vaccines created an environment that allowed a multitude of grievances to flourish before evolving into what is distinctly an anti-government movement.

This is largely representative of Ontario – freedom alliances, special interest groups, and affinity groups converging on a single issue framed as “government overreach”. First it was lockdowns, and masks, then it became COVID-19 vaccines, mandates/passports, etc. The elasticity of the issues continues to move between a number of grievances and the momentum has been built concomitantly with a narrative that the government has not only failed to protect citizens but that it is also harmful.

The Freedom Convoy 2022 is illustrative of a galvanizing process that appears to have been driven by a lack of success in producing governmental changes through dispersed protest events – where before the *Convoy*, entities in most instances were fractured and uncoordinated, this changed sometime since the Federal Election in September 2021 and early 2022. The first rumblings of the Freedom Convoy 2022 were reported by Project Hendon on 13 January 2022. Early information identified that the Freedom Convoy 2022 and Operation Bearhug 2.0 was a highly organized and well-funded action that would bring together affinity groups from across the country and for the first time working cooperatively together towards this national movement – even casting aside former quarrels and disagreements. The narratives expressed through social media as well as directly from the mouths of organizers and supporters alike were ones of assured success in accomplishing a governmental change without the authority of law and with disregard for the democratic process. The Ottawa occupation was not only a product of widespread robust networking and organizing, but was unique in that there appeared to be a very strategic leadership cell which was more ideologically entrenched, experienced, and didn’t fully emerge until the convoy was firmly installed. While the leadership didn’t ‘appear out of nowhere’, some of the individuals who formed this cell were not previously ‘the face of the brand’ throughout the anti-lockdown protests that were ongoing for better part of 22 months.

Emergencies Act

On account of not having specific knowledge of the documentation supplied to government, it is unknown if OPP intelligence reporting contributed to, or was relied upon, when forming the grounds for the invocation of the Emergencies Act on 14 February 2022. However, POIB reporting first identified the Freedom Convoy 2022 (Ottawa Occupation) as a potential national security threat on 7 February 2022 - the 11th day of the occupation. By this time, protesters had been firmly entrenched and occupied a large footprint of the Parliament Hill area and satellite staging areas of Ottawa. Approximately 500 commercial trucks, some purposely disabled, were staged within this footprint, as were pieces of heavy equipment, and a number of amenities consisting of food stations, semi-permanent shelters, entertainment areas, and sanitary facilities positioned and operating to the enjoyment of the protesters without regard for residents and businesses alike. A leadership cadre of individuals had emerged who, as revealed through a series of interviews and press conferences, espoused strong anti-government views deeply rooted in political grievances that predated the pandemic. The City of Ottawa had declared a State of Emergency the day prior (6 February 2022); and the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) issued a social media message advising that anyone providing material support to blockade participants could be subject to arrest (effectively deeming the occupation illegal). OPP Intelligence Operations Section members observed increased tensions and verbal confrontations between convoy participants and counter-protestors, who mainly appeared to be Ottawa residents. An unsanctioned “Indigenous” ceremony took place in Confederation Park which incurred a number of responses from First Nations stating they do not condone the Freedom

Convoy 2022. Monies fundraised through crowdsourcing sat in excess of \$10,000,000 CAD, although access to the funds had been 'paused' by GoFundMe on 2 February 2022. Cumulative POIB reporting and analysis continued to indicate protesters remained assured and steadfast in their objectives to effect a government change without the authority of law and with disregard for the democratic process. Notably, this objective was 'aspirational' with no identified operational planning. This important distinction is not meant to detract from the seriousness of the ideologically motivated commitment exhibited by many within the Freedom Movement and created an operating environment no less tenuous which remained vulnerable to inspired acts that could be carried out by low-sophistication means, lone actor and small group type scenarios. POIB reporting also noted that calls by blockade participants and organizers to obstruct major cities, roadways and border points would almost certainly translate into more action; and actions such as those blocking border crossings to the US, which are integral to international trade, would have the potential to negatively affect the Canadian economy at the local, provincial, and national level. These very actions would be realized only hours later – by the evening hours of 7 February 2022, Freedom Movement protesters staged a blockade at the Windsor-Detroit Ambassador Bridge, and obstructed inbound traffic from the US at the Blue Water Bridge in Sarnia. By way of situational awareness, the support action at the Coutts, AB, border crossing had been ongoing for 10 days (start date 29 January 2022).

The Freedom Movement, representative of multi-grievance anti-government grassroots organizing with a national foothold, particularly sought to leverage the concept of 'peaceful protest' while also attempting to accomplish government change through the use of fear, intimidation, and political acuity. Again, it is important to note that these means were aspirational in that the tactics relied on the government submitting to pressure and concede to demands. As such, the 'criminality' taking place - as defined and measured by benchmark crimes, overt violence, and large scale property damage - was certainly existent, yet could be described as disproportionately lower than what might be expected from a public order event of this size and more difficult to articulate as directly emanating from the protest body and associated actions of the Freedom Convoy 2022. Messaging from lead organizers repeatedly emphasized this narrative and employed it as a strategy, recognizing, that it posed a challenge to law enforcement. POIB reporting identified that the threats posed by the Freedom Convoy 2022 and related support actions were creating a scenario that if left to continue would affect Canada's placement on the world stage, and gave the appearance that the Canadian government was vulnerable to destabilization, susceptible to foreign monies/interference, lawless, and ill-equipped to govern its citizens. Although investigations remain ongoing, current analysis indicates crowdsourcing and funding of the convoy was achieved overwhelmingly through Canadian donors and no foreign influence has been identified. This is reflected widely in recent media reporting. The perception of foreign funding (and where it was being reported through media and social media alike) was nonetheless important to the operating environment at the time. These (potentially) unintended consequences that stretched into National Security realm could not be left unaddressed and the political climate along with the growing civil unrest of the movement as a whole, where threats of violence were omnipresent, and particular to the Ottawa occupation, appeared to necessitate enhanced policing powers to resolve the conflict.

With Respect to Intelligence Failure

The outcome of the "Freedom Convoy 2022" has caused many to discuss the possibility of an "intelligence failure" on the part of criminal and possibly security intelligence. This label gives pause for reflection among intelligence professionals and it focuses review on inter-organizational planning, collection, analysis and dissemination of information – and ultimately the operational actions premised on that intelligence. In consideration of these factors, the OPP's Provincial Operations Intelligence Bureau reviewed our planning, our collection, our analysis and our dissemination – in essence *what we knew*,

when we knew it, what we did with it and to whom it was provided. Further, we reviewed our actions in terms of leadership as the provincial police and also in our role as the leader of a significant joint force initiative – Project Hendon.

The tradecraft of intelligence is subject to ambiguity at times – it is not a perfect science. Intelligence failures undoubtedly occur – their origins and impacts are often opaque due to the inherent confidentiality of the business at hand. Further, these ‘failures’ can come in many guises – failures to ascertain future activity, failures to collect, failure to consume, failure to act on the intelligence – a failure in decision-making. In terms of these failures, however, recent expert opinion has proposed two common attributes that are key to intelligence failures – negligence and consequence.

To better understand the recent events the OPP underwent a review of its actions in relation to these events: Stakeholder identification, tasking, collection, analysis, intelligence production, consultation with partners and dissemination. This documentation illustrates the recognition of the prevalence of “criminal extremism” emanating from multiple ideological and issue-specific spectrums was evident in very early 2020. As a result, the OPP initiated a broad-based national entity to collect information on entities with which there were reasonable grounds to suspect or believe would incorporate criminal activity in their protest activity, or would engage in illegal acts that would present challenges to public safety and/or economic security. This project concentrated on many variants as they rose to the fore and presented that greatest challenge over the period of 2020 to 2022.

By April 2021, the “Patriot Movement” and broad-based anti-government sentiment came to be a focal point for collection though most of the activity was at a low level, with minimal criminal activity. In the autumn of 2021, this element of dissent persisted and had escalated its rhetoric though still there were no significant threats to public safety and very low criminality. This activity, and the associated trends and possibilities, were covered in the Hendon reporting to all stakeholders. By January 2022, however, the Freedom Convoy 2022 had crystalized as a development that may have impact nationally – and especially in Ottawa. By January 13th, the issue was disseminated to all partners – as a focus for further collection to assist in a more precise intelligence assessment of this development. The actions of the Provincial Operations Intelligence Bureau were as follows:

1. POIB first reported on the Freedom Convoy 2022 in the 13 January 2022 Hendon report, and then by way of a special report on 20 January 2022. In the 20 January 2022 report, it was recognized that this event had the potential to raise significant public safety concerns – in Ottawa specifically.
 - a. From January 13 2022 to February 20 2022, POIB has provided: 29 Strategic Intelligence Reports to our clients on this matter.
2. On 21 January 2022, the issue was deemed so significant that POIB initiated a Hendon Teleconference with all Partners on this subject specifically. The purpose was to raise awareness and stimulate more collection and better intelligence production. By this time, the Hendon distribution list for intelligence products and teleconference invites exceeded 200 members with representation from municipal agencies that spanned Vancouver to Montreal, several facets of RCMP, and critical infrastructure stakeholders.
 - a. Since that time POIB has hosted 28 Hendon teleconferences on this topic specifically with all partners;
 - b. Further POIB hosted specific teleconferences on investigative strategies;
3. POIB provided three (3) Tactical Intelligence Reports to specific clients;
 1. Two (2) on the leadership of the organization disseminated on 24 January 2022, to OPS;

2. One (1) on Operational Security concerns to OPS on 9 February 2022, as concerns became apparent;
4. POIB provided three (3) Operational Intelligence Reports focused on eight (8) locations and certain individuals;
 - a. Based on covert deployments in Ottawa;
5. POIB provided two (2) Frontline Bulletins – one (1) general for officer safety and awareness and one (1) specific to an individual – disseminated to all partners on 26 January 2022.
6. POIB addressed five (5) specific questions, in relation to four (4) locales, for Ottawa Police Service Chief SLOLY personally and provided a spreadsheet on rallying points to guide collection.
7. POIB has provided numerous POI profile sheets of individuals, groups, etc.
8. The Director of POIB provided numerous Intelligence Briefings to three (3) important client audiences;
 - a. Ontario Chiefs of Police;
 - b. OACP Operational Planning Committee; and
 - c. The Integrated Planning Cell in Ottawa.

In short, POIB and Project Hendon provided salient information to its stakeholders on what was to be anticipated in Ottawa. Intelligence assessments also provided insight into the fact that the theoretical demands of some protestors were not achievable – and that there was no exit plan. Our assessment then was that there would be massive numbers of protestors, significant trucks and vehicles in support, blockades and significant impact to the flow of traffic, business, government etc.

In conclusion, in relation to determining the nature and extent of failure specific to these events, there are important considerations to consider.

1. In the pre-event planning stages, these individuals and entities did not participate in the realm of criminal activity. Most from Vancouver to Ottawa engaged (as they said they would) in the lawful sphere – the arrests and charges from Windsor to Ottawa illustrate this. So the pro-active balance of civil liberties and public safety/crime prevention – not to mention pro-active intelligence targeting – is a sensitive one. Especially in these politicized times.
2. In terms of intelligence operations, it has been said that intelligence can address “secrets” and “mysteries”. This event did not traverse the country with specific tactical plans. There was not a “secret” to discover apart from what was communicated to all partner agencies. The “mystery” was what would evolve as protestors, and others, co-mingled in an environment in which they could not achieve their stated goals.

This was not a failure in intelligence. This was a broad-based protest movement that primarily announced their intentions and carried them out. In doing so, they presented a significant challenge to law enforcement in evolving into an illegal occupation and a threat to public order. From a pro-active perspective, this was a failure to utilize intelligence in operational preparation, decision-making, and pro-active planning.

With Respect to ‘Threats of Rape from Protesters’

OPP POIB reporting did not reflect instances or allegations of sexual assault (rape) stemming from the Freedom Convoy 2022. This is to say, the words “rape” and “sexual assault” do not appear in Project Hendon reporting specific to the Freedom Convoy 2022. OPP POIB members consulted with Ottawa Police Service (OPS) Intelligence members who advised they did not identify any convoy related sexual assault occurrences, including allegations of sexual assault threats. Where these instances may have occurred they

do not appear to have been reported to OPP or OPS. POIB is aware of the following statements which reference 'threats of rape from protesters' as located in external sources:

1. 31 January 2022 – On the fourth day of the protest, the political lobbying group **Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women** (OCTEVAW) issued a statement that addressed City leadership to take action to end the violence downtown and included “*We have heard of accounts of young women being followed, almost run over, and threatened with rape.*”¹ Without prejudice, the statement published on the first Monday of the Freedom Convoy 2022 and addressing a number of issues while also expressing anti-police sentiment, may have been produced in alignment with the stated political motivations and objectives of OCTEVAW which is to influence public policy.
2. 1 February 2022 – Excerpts from the OCTEVAW statement, which included the section pertaining to threats of rape, were then quoted in a national legacy media article that covered a number of issues derived from the Freedom Convoy 2022 as reported from the ‘fifth day’ of the protest.²
3. 3 February 2022 – During a House of Commons session, Economic and Fiscal Update Implementation Act, 2021, NDP MP Charlie Angus expressed that he had received three messages from young women around the Gloucester and Metcalfe area talking about the *threats of rape* they were facing because of the lawlessness and lack of police to protect residents in Centretown in Ottawa from this protest.³
4. 5 February 2022 - On February 5, 2022, a legacy media article covered items and issues arising from an Ottawa Police Services Board meeting held the same date, and noted: *Ottawa police have declined to answer questions about how many reports of **death threats, rape threats and intimidation have been made to them so far.***⁴
5. 25 February 2022 - During the No. 10 SECU - Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, February 25, 2022, Conservative Member of Parliament Ms. Raquel DANCHO, and Conservative Member of Parliament Mr. Larry BLOCK, each engage Public Safety Minister Hon. Marco MENDICINO to address ‘threats of rape’ when debating the justification for the invocation and removal of the Emergencies Act.⁵ (The Act was invoked 14 February 2022 and removed 23 February 2022.) At issue is whether or not the ‘threats of rape’ were used in the formation of the grounds to invoke the Emergencies Act.
6. 28 February 2022 – Two independent journalism enterprises which demonstrated support for the Freedom Convoy 2022 provided coverage of the 25 February 2022 Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security forum specific to the use of the Emergencies Act and highlighted this particular point of contention.⁶

¹ Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) demands the City’s leadership to take concrete action to end violence downtown” Source: <https://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/home> - accessed 2022-03-16

² Police arrest and charge two people involved with convoy protests, published Feb 1, 2022.– Source: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/police-arrest-and-charge-two-people-involved-with-convoy-protests-1.5762482> - accessed 2022-03-16

³ <https://openparliament.ca/debates/2022/2/3/charlie-angus-2/> - accessed 2022-03-17

⁴ Ottawa ‘under siege’ amid ‘nation-wide insurrection,’ officials say - <https://globalnews.ca/news/8597478/ottawa-trucker-convoy-risk-of-violence/> - accessed 2022-03-16

⁵ <https://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=11539588> – accessed 2022-03-16

⁶ <https://westphaliantimes.com/canadian-federal-minister-claims-freedom-convoy-protesters-threatened-rape-against-ottawa-residents/> & <https://thecountersignal.com/trudeau-minister-calls-convoy-protesters-rape/> – accessed 2022-03-16

Conclusion

In conclusion, the recent protest/dissent movement, and its escalation into an illegal occupation, was a challenge for intelligence personnel and law enforcement in general. Lawful dissent and protest, from all ideological perspectives, must be (and is) protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is incumbent upon intelligence personnel to ascertain when and if these expressions of dissent may evolve into threats to public safety and economic security – as has occurred in British Columbia, Tyendinaga, Caledonia/Six Nations, Ottawa and Windsor, and in other locations – as a catalyst for intelligence collection. The recent civil unrest in Ottawa is an example of the evolution of this activity into an aspirational threat based upon the sincere wishes of the primary protagonists for the government to “step down”. Intelligence is never a “perfect” tradecraft – it involves probabilities and potentialities. Upon review, however, POIB clearly believes that it established relevant stakeholders early, created a responsible reporting cycle, acquired the appropriate information, produced accurate intelligence and shared those products with clients and consumers on a timely basis.