

Five 'threat groups' identified for Alberta, B.C. oil industry

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From Tuesday's Calgary Herald

July 14, 2009

CALGARY - Violent acts or blockades against northern Alberta's oil and gas industry will likely continue in the years ahead, but the disruptions are unlikely to be organized or widespread unless disparate groups come together, says a new report.

The Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute report -- sponsored by Nexen Inc. -- was completed before the two most recent explosions at EnCana facilities in northeastern B. C.

However, author and political scientist Tom Flanagan says his conclusions still hold true. "I don't see any evidence of an organized group doing it," Flanagan said of the Dawson Creek blasts.

The report, part of a series of institute studies directed by the global energy company, identifies five "threat groups" -- individual saboteurs, ecoterrorists, mainstream environmentalists, First Nations and the Metis people.

"All except the Metis have at various times used some combination of litigation, blockades, occupations, boycotts, sabotage, and violence against economic development projects which they saw as a threat to environmental values or aboriginal rights," Flanagan's report said.

"However, extra-legal obstruction is unlikely to become large-scale and widespread unless these various groups make common cause and cooperate with each other. Such co-operation has not happened in the past and seems unlikely in the future because the groups have different social characteristics and conflicting political interests."

When speaking of First Nations in northern Alberta, Flanagan wrote that there exists the potential for "warrior societies"--where aboriginal groups brandish firearms or set up blockades.

"There is no history of warrior societies operating in northern Alberta, but that does not mean it could not happen," the report said.

"A nightmare scenario," he wrote, "would be a linkage between warrior societies and eco-terrorists."

He said his report was written from the point of view of threats specific to the oil and gas industry.

"It's what keeps the ship floating in Alberta. Without it, we'd have a province of one million people rather than three million, and I wouldn't have a job," Flanagan said in an interview.

"I'm sympathetic to the continued prosperity of the industry, so I point out the difficulties they face."

However, environmental writer Andrew Nikiforuk said Flanagan's report focuses on the wrong security issues.

"Energy developments are generally secure when you make sure that surface owners--whether they are farmers or aboriginals--are treated with respect . . . and where regulators don't allow development to undermine groundwater, air quality and health of the local community," Nikiforuk said.

"Most terrorism experts would say Alberta has made itself terribly insecure again by rapidly expanding oil and gas pipelines, and by becoming the number 1 supplier of oil to the United States. We've become a target for global terrorists, who might have an interest in disrupting U. S. oil supplies," he said.

At the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, spokesman Travis Davies said in a statement that the oil and gas industry has worked with all levels of government to ensure energy security.

"The safety of our neighbours and employees is a top priority. In terms of nonviolent campaigns against Canadian energy sources, industry consults with stakeholders in order to understand their issues, and focuses on communicating our demonstrated safety and environmental performance, as well as the stringent regulatory requirements in place for all oil and gas projects," Davies wrote.

The Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute describes itself as an independent research body that focuses on Canadian foreign policy, defence policy and international aid.