

The Unanticipated Pricetag of Being an Olympic Corporate Sponsor

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Monday, March 16, 2009

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[The Canadian Press: Threats against Olympic sponsors worry security officials.](#)

They should be worried! I don't know if they need to be \$1b worried, but if you do the math, there is earned concern:

((The Olympics corporate welfare program) + (obscene reductions in government spending for human beings) + (radical and radicalized groups who object to the billions wasted on this spectacle, and what in our culture it has steamrolled) + (sponsors and government groups that flaunt their glee in the faces of those suffering) + (an opportunity to capture attention on a global scale)) x (an unpredictable economic depression [oops, Great Recession]) = a perfect storm of wariness.

And while the CBC recently reported that the carnage that has become the lower mainland in the last 2 months is likely the playing out of choked distribution points in the Mexican drug war, the climate of fatal violence in and around Vancouver increases the likelihood of radicalized responses to the Olympics.

And if Gordon Campbell gets re-elected [by the way...[did you know that Gordon Campbell hates you?](#)] then we should all expect things to ramp up considerably once he implements his crowning agenda buoyed by being elected a third time!

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Threats against Olympic sponsors worry security officials

OTTAWA — Possible threats against sponsors of next year's Vancouver Olympics have federal security agents wringing their hands over "extremist elements," a newly released intelligence report reveals.

The report by the government's threat assessment centre cites vandalism of a corporate backer's premises, theft of the Games flag, and skirmishes between protesters and police during unveiling of the Olympic countdown clock.

The Royal Bank of Canada, a key Games sponsor, "has been named specifically in anarchist and anti-Olympic Internet postings," notes the analysis, 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics: Terrorist Threat to Vancouver Area Facilities.

Between September 2007 and last May, anarchists claimed responsibility for four attacks in which large rocks were thrown through the windows of Vancouver Royal Bank branches, says the assessment under a

section titled Domestic Non-Islamist Extremist Groups.

"Extremist elements . . . have publicly stated their intent to continue acts of protest and possible violence against both the Olympics and commercial symbols they perceive to represent the 2010 Olympic Games."

The threat assessment also looks at Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network and radicals inspired by the terrorist movement, as well as "Lone Wolf" attackers like Kimveer Gill, a gunman who killed one student and wounded 19 others at Montreal's Dawson College.

The document was prepared last July by the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre, which includes representatives of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the RCMP and several other security and police agencies. A copy was recently released along with other assessments to The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

Several portions of the threat assessments, labelled For Official Use Only, were withheld from disclosure.

Chris Shaw, spokesman for Games monitoring group 2010watch, found the reports amateurish.

"This is the best they can do?" he asked.

"These guys need to get a serious grip, frankly. I think they're really confusing legitimate political dissent, however disruptive it might be, with a threat. And it's simply not."

More than 5,000 athletes are expected from 80 countries at the Winter Games, to begin next February in Vancouver and Whistler, B.C.

Numerous activists, from aboriginal groups to anti-poverty fighters, oppose the Games, saying the expensive mega-event will hurt Vancouver's poor, damage the environment and drain provincial coffers.

The cost of Games security has been pegged at \$900 million, far more than the original estimate.

Organizers are depending on corporate sponsors including the Royal Bank to support and promote the Games, but their participation appears to have heightened fears they will become targets for those who claim the Olympics have come to symbolize money more than sport.

The threat assessment centre prepared two briefs last September on possible actions against the Canadian Pacific Spirit Train that travelled to Montreal from Vancouver to drum up Olympic enthusiasm.

"There have been calls to boycott companies and organizations which support or sponsor the upcoming games," says one assessment. "Acts of vandalism, criminal mischief and trespass against sites associated to the Olympics and its sponsors have taken place and now protest action against the train is being encouraged."

CSIS referred a request for comment to the B.C.-based integrated unit responsible for Games security. However, a unit spokesman did not return phone calls.

Shaw fears the threat assessments could be used to justify cracking down on groups that oppose the Games.

"No one knows who threw the rocks through the (Royal Bank) windows," he said. "Just because somebody's posted something to some obscure blog . . . assuming that therefore you're dealing with anti-2010 anarchist protesters, to use their term, is just absurd.

"If the police knew who'd done it, they would have arrested them, and they haven't. So it could be anybody."

The Royal Bank refused an interview request, but said in a statement it believes most people don't support vandalism against sponsors, adding that the safety and security of employees, clients and suppliers are the bank's top priorities.

"We have numerous security measures in place to protect them and will continue to assess and enhance our security procedures as required," the bank said.

"RBC respects the right of people to express their opinions as long as it is done in a peaceful and respectful manner. We accept that there will always be critics; we would only hope that criticism will be constructive and truthful."

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