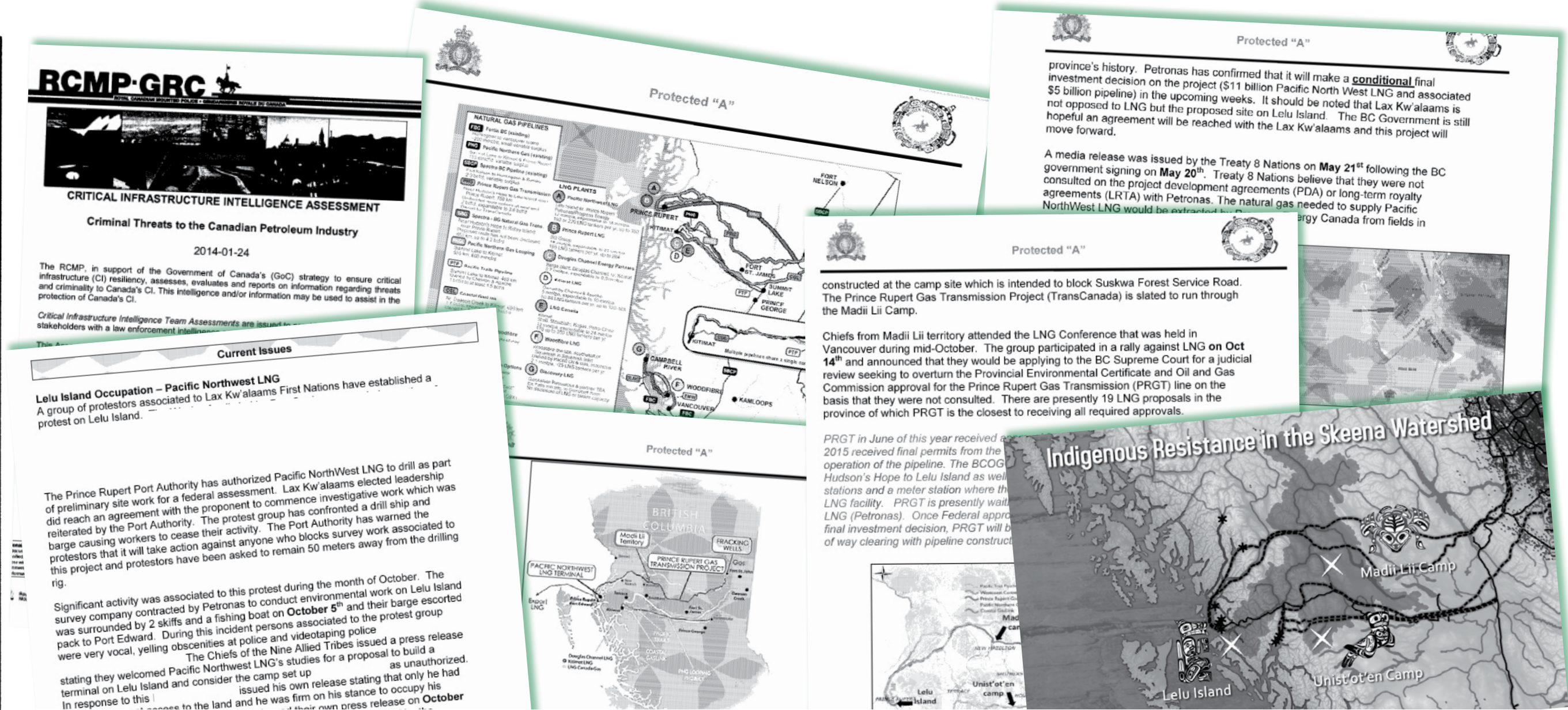


NATURAL GAS NIGHTMARE

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OPPOSING CANADA'S ENERGY AGENDA UNDER INCREASING SURVEILLANCE

BY ANDY CROSBY

On the East Coast, the Mi'kmaq are actively opposing the Alton Gas project, while on the West Coast, the provincial and federal Liberals enthusiastically announce the approval of the Pacific NorthWest LNG pipeline project. Meanwhile, the RCMP pay close attention.



SETTING THE STAGE: ELSIPOGTOG ANNIVERSARY

October 17 marked the three-year anniversary since the paramilitary raid on a Mi'kmaq-led anti-shale gas camp near the Elsipogtog First Nation in New Brunswick. A force of 285 RCMP officers, including Emergency Response Team (camouflage-clad with assault rifles) and tactical units (riot police), enforced a court injunction filed by SWN Resources Canada, a subsidiary of Houston-based company Southwestern Energy, whose equipment had been blockaded since late September, preventing SWN from carrying out seismic exploration activity for natural gas. The RCMP were met with stiff resistance, which included hundreds who rallied from the reserve as the Mi'kmaq Warrior Society faced the assault in the early morning. In the aftermath, 40 arrests were made and six RCMP vehicles torched. The fierce resistance was successful in thwarting the New Brunswick government's aspirations to develop a fracked gas industry in the province. The water protectors won that battle but the struggle continues.

ALTON GAS PROJECT OPPOSITION

A Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia is fighting a separate battle and a different company – but over the same coveted resource. Their fight has spanned the past two years. The Alton natural gas storage project has received government approval with an environmental assessment allowing for the construction of 18 caverns. Alton Natural Gas Storage LP, a subsidiary of Calgary-based AltaGas, aims to hollow out at least two underground salt caverns to build underground storage containers near Fort Ellis, less than an hour north of Halifax. The 1.3 million cubic metres of brine (a slurry of highly concentrated salt water) would then be gradually released into the Shubenacadie River system, which the company claims would not adversely impact the river nor its aquatic life. In late September, members from the Sipekne'katik First Nation established a blockade at the work site, preventing entry to the site. "To allow climate change research to be done and to protect species and habitat for the Bay of Fundy species – salmon, eel, bass – we ask that all permits be stopped until the full legal appeal process is complete," said Cheryl Maloney, a former Sipekne'katik band councillor, at a Sept. 26 news conference. "There's too many things wrong with this project." The blockade was prompted by threats made by the company to sue the Mi'kmaq who had laid eel traps in the river to demonstrate their treaty rights, guaranteed by the Peace and Friendship treaties signed with the British crown in the 1700s. According to Maloney, the company made various promises including jobs and scholarships conditional upon the Mi'kmaq removing their traps and ceasing opposition to the project, as reported by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). "The threats of arrest are a direct violation of the Mi'kmaq covenant of treaties to fish unhindered," she said.

"Don't force the Mi'kmaq people who had to go to the Supreme Court of Canada and fight for hundreds of years for our treaty rights to be recognized, the treaty right to fish and put the eel traps in the water; don't use that as a negotiation tactic against our people," said Maloney. "That's wrong; it's bad business." Nova Scotia's Premier, Stephen McNeil shot back against the opposition, noting in a statement that he is "confident that the Crown has met its obligation to consult with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and others on this project." The Nova Scotia Supreme Court is expected to hear the Sipekne'katik's appeal to the government's granting of project permits in November of this year.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST LNG PIPELINE PROJECT

As opposition against natural gas continues to swell in the Maritimes, the B.C. and federal Liberals enthusiastically announced on Sept. 27 that the long-awaited \$36 billion Pacific NorthWest LNG pipeline had been approved. The project includes a 900 kilometre pipeline to be built by TransCanada and a large processing facility on Lelu Island (known as Lax U'u'la) for which the main funder is Petronas, a Malaysian gas corporation. The project has been met by ongoing opposition. "Just over a year ago, the Tsimshian of Lax Kw'alaams set up camp on Lelu Island, which is just off their village near Prince Rupert," Gord Hill of *Warrior Publications* told the *Leveller* via email. "They've been there since and have disrupted exploratory drilling and survey work by contractors over the past year." Although B.C. Premier Christy Clark declared that the project would create thousands of permanent jobs in an interview with CBC Radio's *The House*, Pacific NorthWest LNG's website specifies that only 330 long-term jobs are forecasted. Lax U'u'la is adjacent to Flora Bank, considered to be the second largest sockeye spawning ground (after the Fraser River) and crucial to the Skeena River ecosystem. The LNG facility would bring with it "the imminent decimation and extinction of the Skeena River sockeye salmon fishery," said B.C. Union of Indian Chiefs Grand Chief Stewart Phillip in an interview with *Ricochet*. In addition to concerns over salmon habitat and Indigenous sovereignty, the carbon footprint of the project will be enormous, the equivalent of a "carbon bomb," as declared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in a submission to the environmental assessment. According to the draft environmental report, the project would add estimated total emissions upwards of 17.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, adding almost 10 per cent to B.C.'s total emissions. The Liberal announcement came on the heels of the Royals' visit to the province and meeting with B.C. First Nations, which was shunned by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. Grand Chief Phillip referred to the ceremony as an "empty symbolic gesture" and "public charade" amidst ongoing Indigenous conflicts with the Crown. Construction on the project will commence once all of the necessary environmental certificates and permits are obtained from the provincial and federal governments, according to Pacific NorthWest LNG's website.

A CLOSER LOOK AT ALTON AND PACIFIC NORTHWEST LNG SURVEILLANCE

The major concerns of government and law enforcement regarding Indigenous dissent to Canada's energy agenda are two-fold: the threat of localized protests drawing outside support and protests disrupting industry activity. A plethora of documents obtained via Access to Information legislation in recent years details an elaborate surveillance regime in place to monitor and mitigate Indigenous resistance to resource development projects on disputed land. A primary concern stemming from the RCMP's raid on the anti-shale gas camp in 2013 was the potential of an "Idle No More-like movement" emerging in its aftermath, as described by Public Safety Canada's Government Operations Centre (GOC). Documents obtained by the *Leveller* reveal that multiple government departments and security agencies tracked associated solidarity protests which included a phone call from the GOC to the Department of Homeland Security's Senior Watch Officer warning that "this movement could spread in the US." Speaking to the incessant fears of the colonial authorities, Maloney expressed at the Alton blockade site that this was not only a localized issue. "And I think they want to take a step back and see who's here. We have treaty beneficiaries from all over Atlantic Canada, from as far away as Boston, Newfoundland and Cape Breton," she said. "People have been coming here to support us." Further documents obtained by the RCMP reveal that the RCMP's 'H' Division's (Nova Scotia) Criminal Analysis section closely followed Mi'kmaq opposition in 2014. The files are heavily redacted but note that following the commencement of drilling, an October protest halted development. In particular, the RCMP's 'H' Division was interested in the presence of the Mi'kmaq Warrior Society (MWS) who had been instrumental in leading resistance efforts to disrupt SWN's efforts near Elsipogtog. The MWS had organized a protest at the Canso Causeway on Sept. 13 with other Cape Breton First Nations opposing oil and gas exploration. On Oct. 8, the RCMP noted a press release issued by the Sipekne'katik First Nation asking AltaGas to cease operations, noting that they are prepared to take action to protect treaty rights. The RCMP in addition to tracking protests, monitored community meetings and a "fishing derby." On the opposite coast, the RCMP's 'E' Division (B.C.) Criminal Intelligence unit of Aboriginal Policing Services produced monthly Strategic Outlook Reports monitoring development projects in B.C. and various Indigenous opposition. Each report contains a section dedicated to liquid natural gas (LNG), noting that the provincial government has "great hopes" to develop the industry. By late 2015, the National Energy Board had approved nine of 14 LNG export license applications so far, with the Petronas project being the largest, according to the reports. The RCMP note that the B.C. and federal government have introduced tax breaks and other incentives to fast-track development. In May 2015, the RCMP report noted that the Lax Kw'alaams Band was offered over \$1 billion, 1,500 hectares of crown land and other incentives to consent to the Pacific NorthWest LNG Terminal on Lelu Island. Although "the

community unanimously voted against the offer," the report notes that an agreement was signed between Petronas and the B.C. government on May 20, 2015. The October 2015 report noted "significant activity" related to Pacific NorthWest LNG protests, including the construction of a cabin on Lelu Island to prevent the Petronas facility from being built. "This camp has received support from the Unist'ot'en and Madii Lii who have constructed similar cabins on their traditional territories to prevent industry from accessing their land." Other protest activity occurred at the Prince Rupert LNG Office, as well as on northern B.C. coastal waters. Noting that the Prince Rupert Port Authority has authorized drilling as part of preliminary site work for a federal assessment, the "protest group has confronted a drill ship and barge causing workers to cease their activity." **ANTI-PETROLEUM EXTREMISM** Indigenous opposition to Canada's energy agenda has prompted the security establishment to pay close attention. The RCMP's Critical Infrastructure Intelligence Team produced an intelligence assessment, entitled "Criminal Threats to the Canadian Petroleum Industry," on Jan. 24, 2014, a few weeks after SWN packed up and left New Brunswick. The Indigenous-led anti-fracking resistance in New Brunswick served as the catalyst for producing the report and was described by the RCMP as "the most violent of the national anti-petroleum protests to date." The report's key findings further note that "violent anti-petroleum extremists will continue to engage in criminal activity to promote their anti-petroleum ideology" and that "these extremists pose a realistic criminal threat to Canada's petroleum industry." The RCMP do acknowledge that many resource development projects are happening or proposed on disputed land, the crux of the ongoing conflict between Canada and First Nations. However, Indigenous people who go beyond engaging in nonviolent "traditional protest activity" are labelled by the RCMP as "violent aboriginal extremists." Thus, protests associated with Indigenous land protection become blurred with terrorism, evidenced in the report's reference to Canada's Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its section on Domestic Issue-Based Extremism. While the report indicates that New Brunswick and B.C. face the "most significant anti-petroleum criminal threat," increased criminal activity is expected on a national scale as pipeline and other energy projects continue to be green-lighted by the federal and provincial governments. Back at the Alton blockade site, Kevin Isaacs from Six Nations, sporting a camouflage jacket with a Mohawk warrior flag sewn on the front pocket, spoke to APTN. "We've got to get serious about this, if we don't, [Trudeau] is just going to push us aside," said Isaacs. "We have to make a major disruption, I'm sorry to say it," he said. "That's the only way they're going to notice us." And notice they do. Rest assured, any threats of a "major disruption" are enough to pique the interest of the security and intelligence community, as well as bureaucrats from a variety of departments operating in the colonial centre. The Alton Gas and Pacific NorthWest LNG projects are only two of many that will continue to be the focus of the RCMP, mandated to fulfill the settler colonial project of unfettered economic expansion on stolen Indigenous land.