

National Post editorial board: No apology for the Mohawk Warrior Society

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The Department of National Defence (DND) reportedly is preparing an apology to the Mohawk Warrior Society for listing it as a potentially violent insurgent group in a 2006 version of a counterinsurgency manual. According to Defence department spokesman Major Martell Thompson, all that remains is “to make sure that it is delivered in a proper format with a proper amount of respect and from the proper level.”

We have a better idea: How about DND issues no apology at all?

The reference in question was contained in a draft of the counterinsurgency manual. Admittedly, strong language was used. The Warriors were described as a “radical native American organization” that could be viewed as having “specific and limited aims,” such as control of local, on-reserve government and influence over federal aboriginal policy.

But the reference — which is hardly inaccurate — reportedly never made it into the final version: When the existence of this draft document became public in 2007, aboriginal and media pressure compelled DND to erase the remarks before the official manual was printed. That cringing gesture alone should nullify the need for an apology.

What of the Warrior Society’s continued participation in land-claims standoffs and continued belligerent, even threatening public statements? They would tend to prove the point of the draft manual’s authors: that the Warriors are a potential insurgency with the capacity to commit violence.

Certainly, many native leaders do nothing to discourage the idea that they might resort to violent gestures if their political demands are not met. So why should we be shy about calling this tactic for what it is?

It was Warrior Society members from the Kanesatake reserve south of Montreal who led the violent 78-day standoff at Oka, Que., in the summer of 1990. Masked and camouflaged Warriors shot and killed a Quebec provincial police officer, Marcel Lemay, in a dispute over the construction of a golf course and homes on land claimed by the Mohawks. The uniforms, language and militant postures they adopted were entirely in keeping with the conceit of an actual insurgency movement.

In the spring of 2006, it was allegedly Warriors who incited violence when Mohawks from the Six Nations reserve occupied a residential subdivision under construction near Caledonia, Ont. in 2006. As Christie Blatchford documents in great detail in her new book, *Helpless*, these are not people who see themselves as bound by Canadian law.

And just last summer on the Mohawk reserve at Akwesasne — west of Kanesatake — masked aboriginals claiming to be Warriors encircled a Canada Customs border crossing, which is situated on Akwesasne land. Nearly 200 band members built bonfires, banged drums and uttered threats to the border agents inside until the agents agreed to abandon their post. (Customs officers insist the Warriors were armed; they claim they were not.)

The Warriors explain they are “just a militia,” not an insurgency. But what communities in Canada — including peaceful self-governing native bands — have the right to their own “militias?” This is Canada, not the Panjshir Valley.

While the Kahnawake longhouse website carries a picture of its Warrior Society that looks more like a slow-pitch softball team than a group of armed rebels, they claim to be in charge of “national defence” of tribal lands. Following the outbreak of violence at Caledonia, the Kahnawake Warriors — officially dubbed the Rotisken’rakéhte or “duty of men to carry peace” — sent a message of solidarity to their Six Nations brothers and sisters demanding that the governments of Canada and Ontario cease “any further plans to invade our territories.”

Our military may find value in building better relations with First Nations communities and people, but this apology — to be delivered early next year — will simply reinforce aboriginal leaders’ tendency to wallow in the politics of victimhood. It is politically correct wallpaper covering over the reality of continued aboriginal militancy.

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