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Two members of military counter-terrorism unit under investigation for allegedly taking part in convoy protests

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Anti-vaccine mandate protests continue in downtown Ottawa on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /POSTMEDIA

Article content

Two serving members of the Canadian military's elite counter-terrorism unit are under investigation for allegedly taking part in protests in downtown Ottawa.

The individuals are members of Joint Task Force 2, this newspaper has confirmed. JTF2 is the unit that would be called upon to deal with terrorism and at times provide protection for VIPs such as the prime minister.

The actions of a third Canadian Forces member, who had served with JTF2 but is now assigned to the procurement section at the Department of National Defence, is also under scrutiny.

Maj.-Gen. Steve Boivin, the commander of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, confirmed he has ordered the two investigations into the alleged activities of those in his organization.

"The Canadian Special Operations Forces Command does not condone its members supporting and/or actively taking part in causes that jeopardize the apolitical imperative associated with their functions," Boivin said in a statement to this newspaper. "I expect our members to act in ways that demonstrate Canadian Armed Forces values and ethics, and to uphold them both on and off duty.

"This has been clearly communicated to our members through the CANSOFCOM chain of command."

The two individuals under investigation serve as "assaulters" — one of the most highly trained positions in JTF2 involving the use of weapons and military tactics.

Retired and serving Canadian Forces personnel were the ones who sounded the alarm about the serving JTF2 personnel taking part in the protests that have paralyzed Ottawa since Jan. 28. They allege that some serving members of JTF2 have openly voiced anti-vaccination and anti-government views while at work at the Dwyer Hill counter-terrorism training centre. Some of those anti-government views have been directed specifically at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and have centred particularly on Liberal government gun control policies, they allege.

Besides the three individuals, another member of CANSOFCOM has been allegedly ferrying supplies to the protesters in downtown Ottawa, sources say. There is no investigation into that individual's alleged actions at this point.

Protesters in Ottawa want the government to remove the rules designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But other demonstrators have called for the overthrow of the Canadian government.

Around 10 members of CANSOFCOM have refused to be vaccinated. They are leaving the Canadian Forces. Military sources say most of the personnel who refused vaccinations work at the Dwyer Hill base.

Boivin said the two special forces soldiers under investigation were already in the process of being released from the military. “If the allegations are accurate, this is wrong and it goes against CAF values and ethics,” he added.

Military sources told this newspaper that just before the convoy protesters descended on Ottawa, a form outlining ethics and proper conduct on social media was circulated at JTF2 and the Dwyer Hill Training Centre.

Department of National Defence spokesman Dan Le Bouthillier confirmed the information from the sources, adding that the form was to “remind members of both expectations and their obligations as CAF (Canadian Armed Forces) members.”

He noted that the document informed JTF2 members “of the importance of remaining above the fray of political debate.”

Le Bouthillier described the form as a code of conduct document based on pre-existing military orders and regulations. But the Department of National Defence declined to provide a copy of that document due to “operational security.”

The Canadian military has been dealing with a number of individuals who have voiced their support for the protesters or who have pushed anti-government and anti-vaccination messages on social media.

The Canadian Forces has launched an investigation into the actions of Warrant Officer James Topp, a reservist from B.C., Le Bouthillier said Sunday. Topp posted a video noting he is marching to Ottawa to protest against the requirement for federal employees to have a vaccine against COVID-19.

Topp noted he had served with the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry and is being booted from the military for his failure to follow orders from defence chief Gen. Wayne Eyre on being vaccinated. Topp said he works as a civilian for the RCMP but is on leave without pay “because I will not change my vaccination status.”

Last week, the Canadian Forces launched another investigation after an army officer called on police and fellow military personnel to rise up against the federal and provincial governments over COVID-19 pandemic regulations.

Maj. Stephen Chledowski, an artillery officer in New Brunswick, appears in a nine-minute video in which he accuses federal and provincial politicians of being traitors and suppressing the rights of Canadians. “I am calling on my military and police comrades to now stand up and protect your loved ones against this government-forced medical tyranny,” he said in the video downloaded on various social media outlets.

Le Bouthillier said the Canadian Forces will take action against Chledowski. “A hallmark of our democracy is the principle that the military is accountable to our duly elected officials,” he said. “Discipline is another key principle that underpins our effectiveness as a military.

“Those who disregard these principles undermine the very foundation of our institution.”

Chledowski, who appears in uniform during the video, says he is unvaccinated.

Chledowski claims “liar” politicians and governments have tricked Canadians with regulations and health measures designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Chledowski told journalists he has been told not to comment on his case.

Disciplinary action has also commenced against a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force who recently went on Twitter in full uniform with a video supporting the Ottawa convoy protesters. The RCAF member’s account included retweets of material critical of Trudeau as well as other material questioning vaccines.

In May 2021, a Canadian Forces member who called on fellow military personnel to refuse to help with the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines was charged with an offence related to mutiny. It’s believed to be the first time in decades that the Canadian military has laid such a charge. A court-martial hearing will be held in September for that individual.

Officer Cadet Ladislas Kenderesi was charged with one count of “endeavouring to persuade another person to join in a mutiny,” an offence under the National Defence Act. Kenderesi was also charged with one count of behaving in a scandalous manner unbecoming of an officer.

Kenderesi will face a court martial sometime in September, Le Bouthillier confirmed.

Kenderesi has said he was fully aware he could get in trouble for his comments, but added he didn’t care.